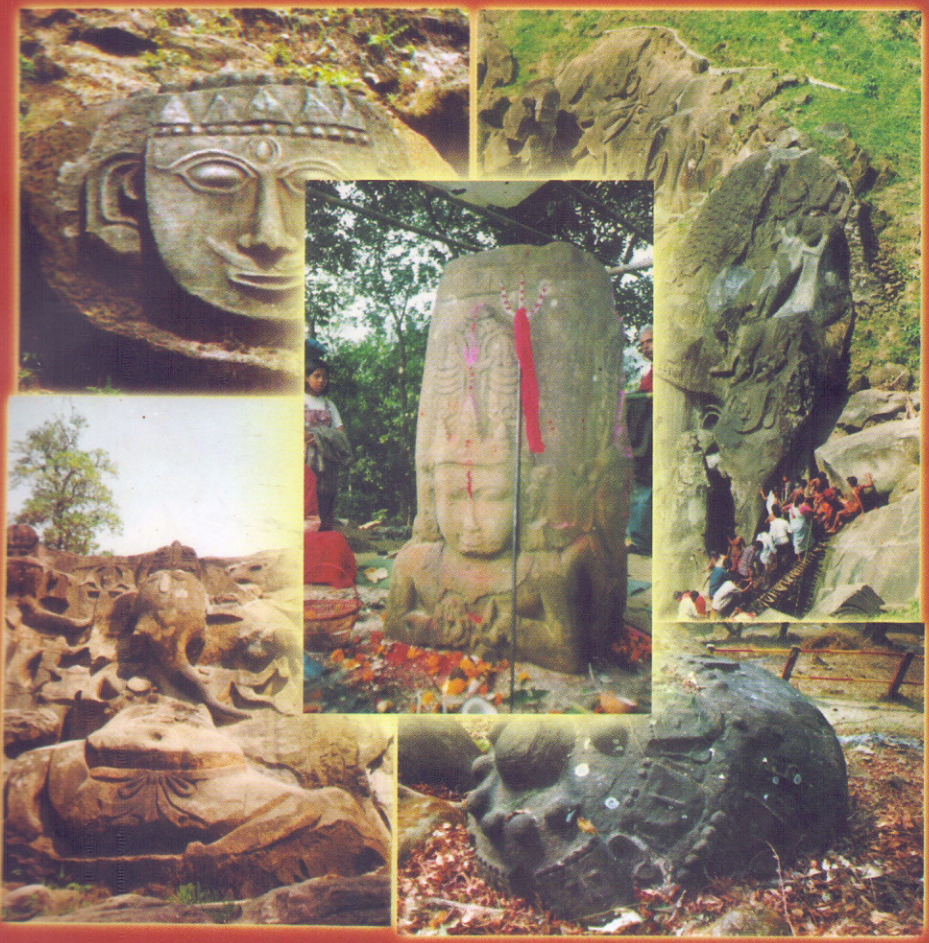
ROCK-CUT ART AND SCELPTURES OF TRIPURA



Dr. Biswadip Nandi

TRIBAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

GOVT. OF TRIPURA

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Book "Rock-cut Art and Sculpture of Tripura" is a presentation on Art and Culture of Tripura and its neighbouring regions from the pre-historic period. Acording to Vedic Cutture of Indian Vision & Hindu sanskriti, Lord Shiva, Krishna, Ganesha etc god & goddesses were the focal point of Indian Sculpture. Rock- Cut Relief and Sculpture were then made under direct involmency of Maharajas, Zaminders, Community Chiefs. All these sculpture indicates the socio-religions situation and related scientific and artistic knowledge of the people of ancient period.

In this book the author has attempted to explore the Art & Culture prevailed during these period in Tripura and its neighbouring which obeviously a comandable work presented in this book.

ROCK-CUT ART & SCULPTURES OF TRIPURA

Dr. BISWADIP NANDI

TRIBAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
Govt. of Tripura
2008

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Rock-Cut Art & Sculptures of Tripura

Edited by : Dr. Biswadip Nandi

First Edition : August- 2008

Published by :
Tribal Research Institute
Govt. of Tripura
Agartala - 799001
Telefax : 081 2324389

Type setting and Printed by :
Tripura Bani Prakashani
Dutta Super Market, Sakuntala Road,
Agartala - 799001

Price : Rs. 150.00 (One hundred and fifty)

Preface

Lying approximately between 22.56° and 24.31° north latitudes and between 90.09° and east longitudes, Tripura is a small hilly state of North-East India. Tripura is enriched with important archaeological spots which speaks about her glorious past and its aged old history, In this book, attempt has been made to focus on the important archaeological spots of the state. Particularly about Unakoti, Pilak, Deotamure, Udaipur, Sonamura etc. For preparing the manuscript indepth study conducted on the archaeological records available in Asiatic Society, Kolkata and the very recent reports on archaeology of the region in A.S.I. office, Ambari, Guwahati have been searched. But a scanty reference either of the ancient or mediaeval sculptures of Tripura were found in those centress. Published source materials were also rarely found about archaeobgical picture of Tripura. Hence, researcher need to take extensive has to depend only on field study in the actual spots and observations and documentation of the rock-arts & scucpture so far available to gather knowledge of the matter. Because of the scarcity of the recorded information about the particula region, researcher tried to acquire knowledge of the other areas which are geographically very adjacent to the discussed area. A link between neighboring areas and the par-

ticular region is found during the study. Museum collections of neighboring regions - Assam State Museum, site museum of Madan Kamdev, Assam. also the archaeological remains found at different adjacent areas - Khaspur, Bhuban hill in Kachar district, temple sites in Assam - Sukreswar-Janardan temple, Vasistha Ashram, Umananda Bhairab, Kamakhya hill etc. researcher has visited personally all these places and studied carefully the rock-cut sculptures to find the stylistic relation between these works and the art works of the discussed area. Indian Museum, Kolkata, State Archaeology, W.B. Birla Academy Museum, Asutosh Museum, Kolkata have been visited to get knowledge of archaeological discoveries in those places and presented with suitable example in this book in the form of comparative approach to on the qualities of the rock arts found at Tripura region.

To understand the socio-cultural background, tribal people of the state residing in and arround ancient land within the Rock scelpture zone, attempt has been made to prepare tne oral history through the field survey on the socio-religious belief of the tribal and non tribal communities dwelling in the adjacent regions of the main spots as their social life and culture may have connection with the art forms depicted on rock surfaces inn the hilly areas. The methods adopted are participation, observation seeking from grass root level answers to questionnaire on various aspects of their socio-religious belief and traditions. Data collected from secondary sources such as books, journals, news papers have been used to cross check

the primary data and also to provide information where primary material is not available. For data collection, of data personal interview were taken from the well experienced person with the information received handed down from generation to generation closely related with the archaelogical spots. As secondary source some very rare published works like 'Tripura Rajye Trish Batsar' by Brajendra Ch. Dutta, 'Tripur desher Katha' by Tripur ch. Sen. Various folktales prevalent traditionally among the villagers were compiled.

Prof. B. Mate, Dean, School of Humanities, Assam University, Silchar and Prof. P.P.Deb, Ex-Dean, Faculty of Visual Arts, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. In this context, opinions of other Scholars Dr., Ratna Das (Ex-curator, Tripua Govt. Museum, Agartala), Dr. Sovan Som, Dr. Bipradas Palit (State Archaeological Officer, Tripura), Dr. Amal Roy (Supdt. Of Archeology, W.B.) have helped a lot to complete this manuscript and to make it presentable. I am thankful to all the connected persons and the concerned departments for the successful completion of this research. Researcher is also thankful to be the local tribal and non tribal people for their kind suggestions.

The present book presented in six chapters.

The first chapter is divided in three sub-chapters - Geographical situation, Historical background and Land and People. In the second chapter researcher has tried to describe socio-economic condition of the local tribal groups. Their early social life and economy have also been described in this chap-

ter. In third chapter. art practices prevalent in their society is described and discussed. Bamboo and Cane craft. Jewelry, Textile etc. produced and used by local tribal people are discussed in detail. In fourth chapter, rock-cut images found at different places like Pilak, Deotamura etc. are discussed. Rock-cut images found at Unakoti have been discussed with great importance to understand the various aspects of Unakoti art. In fifth chapter, pre-discussed art of works have been compared to the arts of other places like Bengal, Assam, Tibet, Cambodia etc. to understand the uniqueness of Tripura sculptures.

In the sixth and last chapter researcher has tried to come to the conclusion in order to write concluding remarks.

Dr. Biswadip Nandi

Foreword

Tripura is an ancient place in the history of Indian Sub-Continent. From time immemorial, even before Tripura was deminated by Tribal Kingdom, civilised societies were there in Tripura & its surrounding regions. Rock Art and Sculpture of the then period which were being found during the last 500 years, speaks about the glorious past of this region. Sri Biswadip Nandi, a Research scholar of Assam University has studied lot of such archacolotical spots and explained in methodical manner for his PhD award and unfolded the history of mankind and also their culture which have got archaeological value and description of socio-religious life & culture of the then period.

I think this book will be an additional reference for the students of Fine Arts and Sculpture, Ancient history, Indian Culture and other descipline.

Last of all, on my behalf & Tribal Research Institute I convey my thanks to Dr. Nandi for such a presentation of Rock Art & Sculpture of this region.

12/08/08

Dated, A gartala
the_12_/_8_/08.

(J.D.Tripura)
Director.
Tribal Research Institute,
Govt. of Tripura.

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1

Introduction
GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION

Tripura, the princely state merged to Indian Union in year 1949 . This ancient land having glorious past is located in the north –east region of India and is bounded on the north, west, south and south-east by the international boundary of Bangladesh. In the east it has a common boundary with Assam and Mizoram. Major area is under hills and forests. This panoramic tiny state with the area about 10,500sq.km is inhabited mostly by tribal people and the Bengalees. The whole land is divided in four districts -North, South, West and Dhalai district. Many places of archaeological importance are there in the state viz. Pilak, Deotamura, Unakoti etc. Both the places like Pilak and Deotamura are in south Tripura district while Unakoti is in north Tripura district. Unakoti the very important place, socially as well as historically, is at a distance of 180km from capital town Agartala. Nearest town Kailashahar is about 8km from Unakoti. Unakoti is also connected with another town Dharmanagar by a 20km long road which finally goes towards Kailashahar.

Unakoti hill is known as Raghunandan parbat in early ages , but the name is almost forgotten , rather people call it as Unakoti hill. Unakoti hill range has such a direction which leads the range towards the north and the northern portion of the range is now in Kulaura of Sylhet district in Bangladesh. There the hill has been known as 'Sharer gujer pahar'[the hill that looks like hump of bull] . In the south-west corner of the hill there is a river named Manu. This river has a significant connection with Unakoti.

Historical Background

Tripura and its early history is still an unfolded an chapter. History of Manikya kings in Rajmala as written by Sukreswar and Baneswar also can't tell the fact as it has been written to appease the Manikya dynasty; not as history. The fact written in Rajmala till the reign of RatnaManikya and DharmaManikya is believable because coins, inscriptions of Manikya rulers support the fact.But before that period ,no such element is still found. Therefore it can be assumed that, the story of Rajmala before that period [14th—15thcentury] is dependant on folk-tales and poetic imagination.Also mythical Druhyu,Yayati have been connected with ancient history of Tripura in this way.As there is no proper written history of the land which can tell about the political situation of the period before 14th,15th centuries , reference can be taken from history of Bengal.Dr.Niharranjan Roy writes in 'Bangalir Itihas'[page-113] that the present land of Tripura has been a part of 'Samatata' and remains the centre of the state from

7th to12th century A.D. Author shows evidences in support of his assumption - Mehar pattoli of Damodardeb[1234], manuscript of 11th,12th centuries etc. Then who are the inhabitants of Tripura in pre-Manikya period ? It is not easy to answer this question. Shri Suren Debbarman while discussing about the topic inhis book 'Tripurar Adibasi –Jeeban O Sanskriti' says that Halam –Kuki people are early inhabitants of the region and they have been known as Kiratas. Also the region known as Kiratabhumi. Capital of Kiratabhumi is Rangamatiya . Kiratabhumi –an independent state is inhabited by Kiratas. Even great epics like Mahabharat also tells the story of Kiratbhumi and Kirata people. In Rajmala written by Puranjan Prasad Chakrabarti [published by Parul prakashani , Agt] there is also a discussion about Kiratdesh . Author writes that Tripura , Shrihatta,Kachhar, the hilly region in the east of these states is known as Kiratdesh [p-64] . Author also mentions various references to find the location Rajrajeswari tantra, writings of Arian , Deodoras, Ptolemy, Periplus of erithrian sea, Brihat sanhita by Barahamihir [p—66].

As Shri Suren Debbarma writes in his book that Halam-Kuki people known as Kiratas in ancient past came from north-west part of China and entered this land through Tibet. When Tripuri or Fa people came then after conquering Rangamatiya the capital of Kiratabhumi they established a new kingdom and delere as new rulers of the land Kirata people as a result ran away and gather in northern part of Tripura . Though Kiratas have lost their capital Rangamatiya still they have the

possession of Belkum fort[on langtarai hill] . Suren Debbarma opines in his book that the name Thanangchi [the land of Kuki Halam people] he finds in various ancient books of Tripura. He also writes taking informations from Traipur Sanhita by Shri Alindralal Tripura that 'Garia' –popular deity worshipped by Tripuri people are in the land of Kuki Halam at past and later Dhanyamanikya occupies Thanangchi and brings it to Rangamati or present Udaipur.Thanangchi the land of Halam Kuki has been extended up to Lushai hill in the east and N.C hill in the north [collection of metal objects used by Kuki royal family in the early ages in Haflong District Museum stand in support of such notion].

SOUTH AND WEST TRIPURA IN PRE-MANIKYA PERIOD:-

It is assumed that present land of Tripura has been a part of Eastern Bengal in the Pre-Manikya ages. The northern zone of the land has been separated from southern and western zone by some hill ranges situated parallely in north-south direction. Southern as well as western portion of the land belong to the domains of the rulers of South-Eastern Bengal in different periods. Important historical places like Sonamura (West Tripura), Pilak (South Tripura), Udaipur (South Tripura), Deotamura (south Tripura) have close connection with the neighboring region like Mainamati hill in Comilla (presently in Bangladesh). Comilla, forming the western boundary of present South Tripura has been supposed to be connected with the land in early ages. Buddhist civilization of ancient Sonamura, Pilak area is extension of ancient Mainamati

civilization. So in the early ages the areas of present south and west Tripura have came under the rulers of south-eastern Bengal. Copper plate of vainya Gupta found at Gunaighar of Comilla proves the presence of Gupta ruler in this region in 575 A.D. After that Tripura copper plate found at Comilla mentions one Loknath the feudatory king. Copper plates issued by some Kharaga rulers are also found at Comilla. Another copper plate of Shridharan Rata found at Kailan in Comilla has told about another royal dynasty. It can't be said definitely whether the land of south and west Tripura has been occupied by the pre-mentioned dynasties of neighboring region or not. During 10th 11th centuries , the region of Comilla particularly hilly region of Mainamati comes under Chandra rulers of Vikrampur and the name 'Mainamati' is also related to this dynasty. Copper plates of Chandra rulers found at Charpatramura of Mainamati in Comilla clarify the matter. Silver coins found at Shalban Bihar of Comilla show particular names which can be pronounced as 'Pattikera' and 'Harikela'. Therefore it is assumed that the region of south and west Tripura as well as Chattagram in the south and Comilla district have been known as Harikela in the early ages. Rampal copper plate of Chandra ruler Shri Chandra mentions his father Trailokya Chandra as ruler of Harikela. 'Rudraksha Mahatya' by Basudeb Kabikankan Chakraborty, 'Kalpadru' of Keshab Krityasar mention Shrihatta as Harikela . Therefore it can be assumed that the regions of south-east Bengal Comilla, Chattagram , south and west Tripura probably and Shrihatta

also have been known as Harikela. 'Pattikera' of the silver coins found at Shalban Bihar is the name of the particular region and adjacent land of southern zone of present Tripura probably. During 11th , 12th and early 13th centuries Pattikera has been a well known place as the name is mentioned in a copper plate of a Buddhist king Shri Ranabankamalla Harikaldeb(1204-1220 A.D.). The copper plate has been found at Lalmai Mainamati region of Comilla in 1890 A.D. (ref:- Prachin Bangalar Bouddha Bihar by Ali Imam, p-76). Pattikera has been the capital of the kingdom of Harikaldeb. Such epigraphic discovery proves the existence of the state of Pattikera even in 13th century A.D.

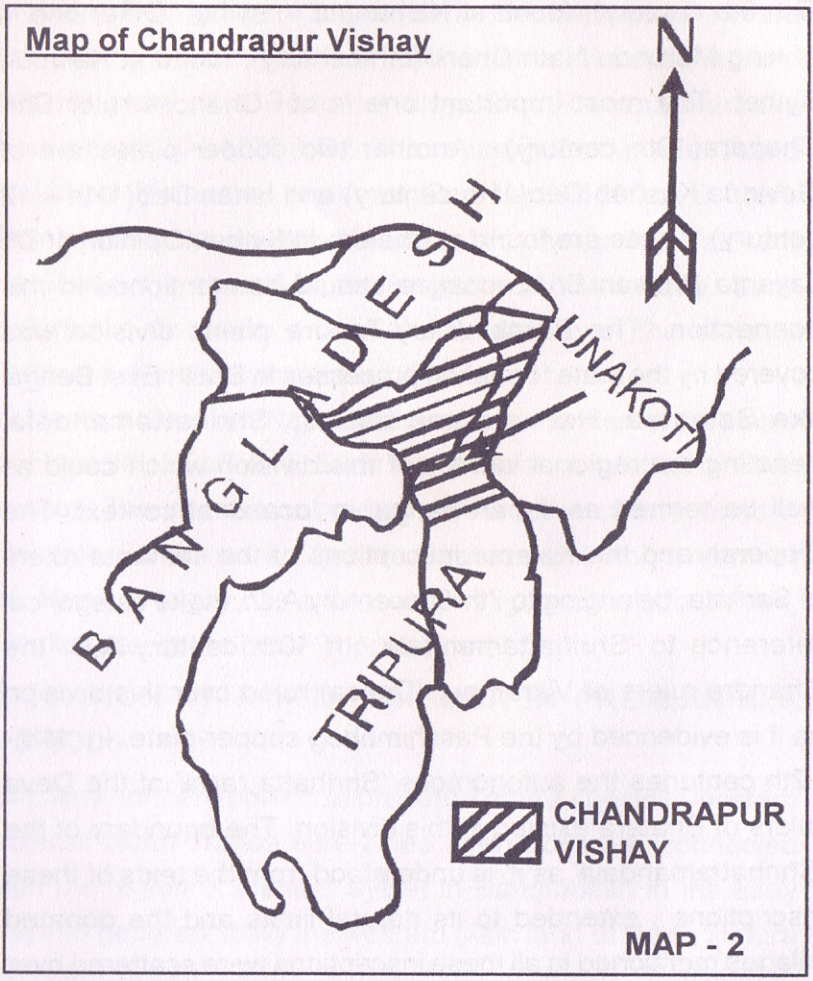
In Manikya chronicle 'Rajmala',there is no mention of the states of Harikela or Pattikera. Even the ancient civilization of Pilak in south Tripura have no mention of the place can be found in Rajmala. Samarendra Chandra Debbarman being a member of Manikya family has expressed his ignorance about Pilak, Unakoti etc. in the book 'Tripura Smriti'.

SITUATION OF NORTH TRIPURA IN PRE-MANIKYA PERIOD:-

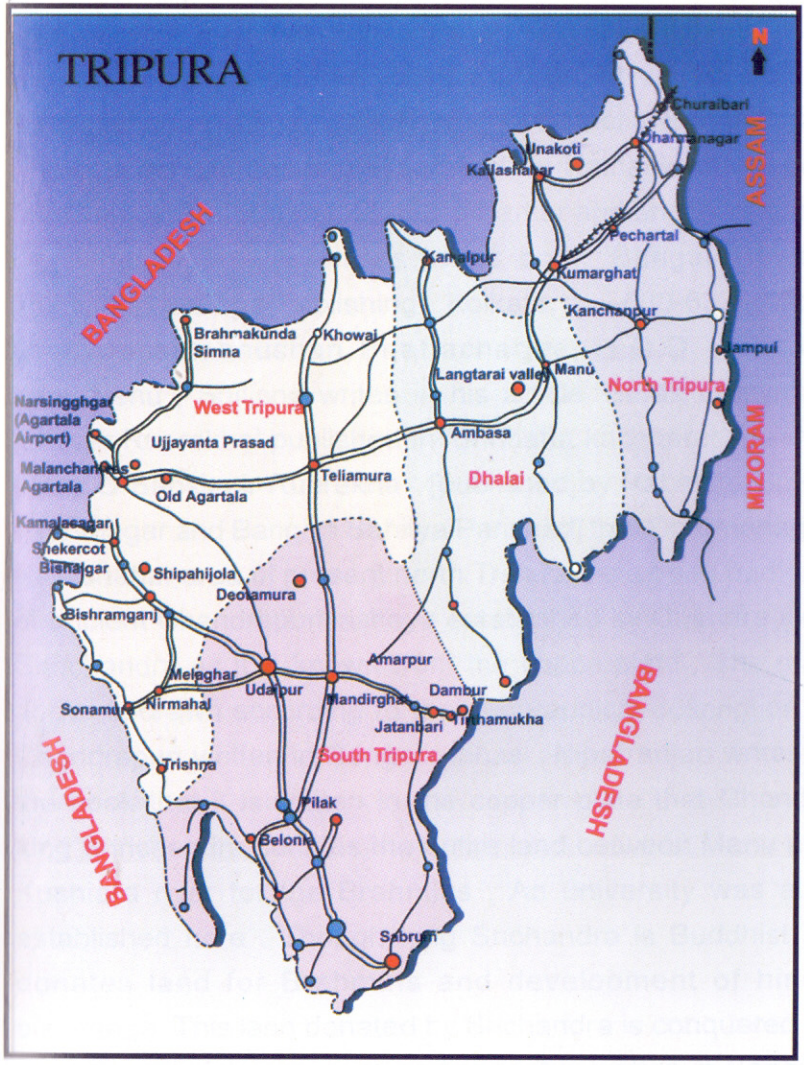
Similarly northern portion of present Tripura specially western zone of North Tripura surely has been politically connected with the region of present Sylhet in Bangladesh in the early days as geographically the western plain land of North Tripura is connected with Sylhet or ancient Shrihatta. 'Shrihattamandala' of 10th century as mentioned in Pashchimbhag copper plate of Shri Chandra , of course covers

the land of western plains of North Tripura. Several copper plates of different periods issued by different rulers are found at Sylhet. The earliest one is of Kamrup king Bhaskar Barman (7th 8th century), found at Nidhanpur in sylhet. Other one is of king Marundu Nath Chand(8th century), found at Kalapur, Sylhet. The most important one is of Chandra ruler Shri Chandra(10th century) . Another two copper plates are of Govinda Keshab Deb(11th century) and Ishan Deb(11th – 12 century). These are found at Bhatera in Sylhet. Opinion of Dr. Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee should be mentioned in this connection "The Barak Valley-Tripura plains division was covered by the state formation processes in South East Bengal like Samataa, Harikela and others, 'Shrihattamandala' denoting the regional identity of this division which could as well be termed as 'Ishan-Banga' in locational context. The Tipperah and the Kalapur inscriptions of the samanta rulers of Samata, belonging to 7th-8th century A.D., make categorical reference to 'Shrihattamandala'. In 10th century A.D. the Chandra rulers of Vikrampur (Dacca) ruled over this division as it is evidenced by the Paschimbhag copper-plate. In 11th-12th centuries the autonomous 'Shrihatta rajya' of the Deva rulers of Bhatera existed in this division. The boundary of the 'Shrihattamandala' as it is understood from the texts of these inscriptions , extended to its natural limits and the donated villages mentioned in all these inscriptions were scattered over Cachar, Karimganj and Sylhet districts and the Kailashahar-Dharmanagar area of Tripura ." (ref:-Political Divisions and

Culture zones in North East India by J.B. Bhattacharjee, published in Archaeology of North-Eastern India,P-8).



Situation of north Tripura during 10th-11th centuries , reference taken from history of Bengal - Pashchimbhag copper plate



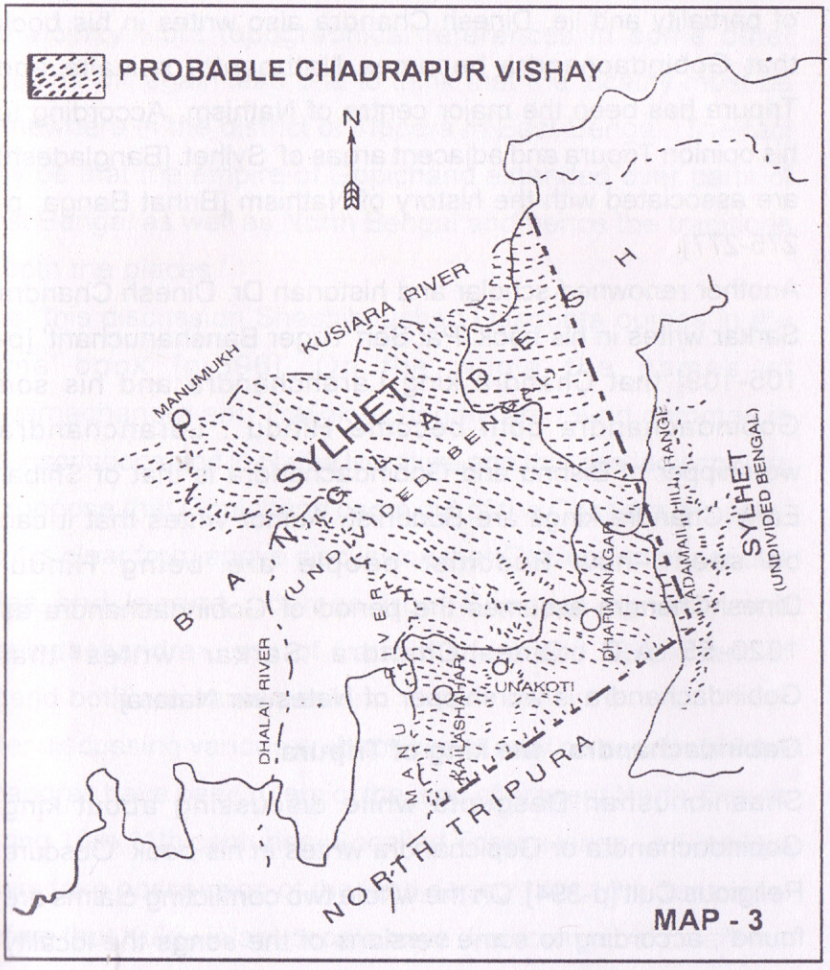
MAP - 1
MAP OF TRIPURA

Chandrapuri vishaya.The entire area of Unakoti , Kailashahar and other adjoining areas come under Chandra rulers during 10th century. Evidence supporting this fact is a copper plate named 'Pashchimbhag copperplate. It is found at Pashchimbhag village in present Sylhet district of Bangladesh. The copperplate has been read first by Kamal kanta Gupta and later by Prof. Dinesh Chandra Sarkar and on this reading Dr. Niharranjan Roy writes in his book 'Bangalir Itihas' [published byDey's Publishing , Kolkata, p—630-632]. Later Prof. Jayantabhushan Bhattacharjee, H.O.D , History dept.,Nehu , Shillong writes in his article 'Barak upatyakar Itihaser Ruprekha' published in 'Shrihatta kachharer Prachin Itihas O Sanskritir Ruprekha ' [published by Rabindra Smriti Granthagar and Bangiya Sahitya Parishad] that Dharmanagar Kailashahar area of present north Tripura have been portions of ancient Chandrapuri vishaya established by Chandra king Shrichandra as it is known from the copperplate . The map above is drawn according to the geographical description of Chandrapuri written in Bangalir Itihas . Niharranjan writes in the book that it is written in the copper plate that Chandra king Shrichandra donates the entire land between Manu and Kushiara river for the Brahmins . An university was also established here . Though king Srichandra is Buddhist he donates land for Brahmins and development of hindu pilgrimage. This land donated by Srichandra is conquered by his father Trailokyachandra earlier as it is written in Bangalir Itihas [p-431] that Trailokyachandra conquers

Shrihatta[Shrihatta is very adjacent to North Tripura specially Unakoti, Kailashahar, Dharmanagar areas] and it can be assumed that these areas adjacent to Shrihatta also come under Chandra rules. Shrichandra after occupying these areas attacked Kamrup also [Bangalir Itihas-p-432] .

All these Chandra kings are Buddhists . But Larahchandra grandson of Shrichandra has been interested in Hinduism and visits 'Banaras' or Kashi several times [Bangalir Itihas p-432] .His son Gobindachandra [11th century] converts himself into a Nathpanthi saivaite being influenced by nathasiddha and his own mother Mainamati as legend says. The legend of mother and son is still famous in Bangladesh. It can be assumed and it is quite possible that Gobindachandra builds such a pilgrimage at Unakoti ¡it has been a part of Chandrapuri vishaya already] and the area is already donated by his forefather to the Hindu Brahmins. This huge area donated by Shrichandra is known as Chandrapuri.

Chandra rulers who rule over the land between Manu and Kushiara river [according to Pashchimbhag copperplate] are in power till 11th century . In support of such notion opinion renowned historians should be mentioned. Dinesh Chandra Sen , D.lit, writes in his book 'Brihat Banga' that Gobindachandra the Chandra king is attacked by Rajendra Chole in 1205A.D., the story is found in various folktales. Some songs collected from Rangpur of Bangladesh by Magistrate of Nilphamri subdivision , Shri Bisweswar Bhattacharjee , tell about the fact. Also it is said in the songs



that Rajendra Chole being defeated offers his daughter to Gobindachandra . But in Tirumalay inscription it is written that Gobindachandra flies away from the battle field. But author[Dinesh Chandra Sen] does not believe in the sayings of Tirumalay inscription. He says that such inscription is result

of partiality and lie. Dinesh Chandra also writes in his book that Gobindachandra becomes Nathpanthi saivaite and Tripura has been the major centre of Nathism. According to his opinion Tripura and adjacent areas of Sylhet [Bangladesh] are associated with the history of Nathism [Brihat Banga, p-275-277].

Another renowned scholar and historian Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sarkar writes in his book 'Pal Sen Yuger Banshanucharit' [p-105-109] that Chandra king Larahchandra and his son Gobindachandra both become Hindu . Larahchandra worshipper of Bishnu and Gobindachandra is that of Shiba. Early Chandra kings are Buddhist. Author writes that it can be seen –how Buddhist people are being Hindu. DineshChandra assumes the period of Gobindachandra as 1020-55 A.D. DineshChandra Sarkar writes that Gobindachandra is worshipper of Nateswar Nataraj.

Gobindachandra - the king of Tripura.

Shashibhushan Dasgupta while discussing about king Gobindachandra or Gopichandra writes in his book 'Obscure Religious Cult'[p-394] 'On the whole two conflicting claims are found ; according to some versions of the songs the locality of the whole story of Gopichand is North Bengal in or near about the district of Rangpur , while in many other versions the locality is said to be in the district of Tippera. As a matter of fact the topographical references found in some of the versions lead us to North Bengal and there are traditions in those parts of North Bengal of Gopichand's being a king of

the vicinity ; but topographical references in some other versions will again lead one to think that the locality must be somewhere in the district of Tippera in East Bengal. The fact may be that the empire of Gopichand extended over parts of East Bengal as well as North Bengal and hence the traditions in both the places '

After this discussion Shashibhushan Dasgupta opines in the same book [p-396] 'On the whole the names of Suvarnachandra and Trailokyachandra are found common in the inscriptions and in Natha literature and this has led scholars to suppose that Gopichand came out of the Chandra dynasty.' So it is clear from above discussion that Gopichand of popular tales and legend , comes from Chandra dynasty and Gobindachandra , son of Larahchandra and 'Gopichand'of legend both are same person.

After discussing various probabilities, it may be assumed that, Chandras have been rulers of the land of present North Tripura during 10th,11th centuries. Socalled Tripura kings i.e.Manikya rulers take possession of the land during 14th,15th centuries. Before that Kuki-Halam people have their own tribal chief who rules the area. At the time of Chandra rulers probably Kukis remain there but as 'Raiats'. And according to Pashchimbhag copperplate Chandrapuri vishaya established in the area , has eight Maths four for non Bengalee people and priests and other four for Bengalee people and priests [Bangalir Itihas

p-631]. This non Bengalee people may indicate the early inhabitants of the land like Kuki people.

Unakoti –as it has been assumed that the area comes under Chandra rules and has been a part of ancient Chandrapuri vishaya. There is a mythological story about the spot often told by local people. The story goes like this once upon a time, a king wants to build 'New Kashi' here and Kalu kamar a skilled sculptor getting revelation from lord Shiba is engaged in constructing a pilgrimage like Kashi. And he has to complete the images of one crore Gods and Goddesses within one night. He completes almost all the figures except one. Then after completing all the figures except one within the night he wants to make a self portrait . He has been engaged in making self portrait so much that he does not notice of dawn. Still the last one remains incomplete and finally the sun comes out and crow starts cawing. So the project remains incomplete as the condition of making one crore figures with in one night is not ful filled . Unakoti - the name comes from the incident that means –one less than a crore. Such story though mythological has a relation with history and it will be discussed later in chapter - 6.

Another story is there about Unakoti. One day Debi Parbati [Shiba's counterpart] finds Shiba with a Kuki woman and gets angry. She curses Shiba to become stone image. As a result since then Shiba is at Unakoti with his followers and suits as stone images.

All these stories have significant connection with the historical fact . Justification of these stories should be found.

LAND AND PEOPLE

To gather knowledge about the matter one has to depend on various published works on the particular topic. Such an important published work is 'Tripurar Lokojeeban O Lokosanskriti' by Dr. Ranjit Dey. Dr. Dey tries to draw a distinct picture of the matter in this book. He writes that Tripura is a land bounded by the land of Bangladesh and there is 845 K.m international boundary . In the north there are districts like Shrihatta, Comilla, Noakhali [all these are now in Bangladesh], in the south the land is bounded by districts of Noakhali and Chattagram. In the west there lies the land of Comilla and in the east it is Assam[p—1]. Also there is a hilly land called Mizoram in the east [109k.m boundary] . Major hill ranges of Tripura are — Langtarai, Takkatulsi, Deotamura, Atharomura, Boromura , Jampui etc. Important rivers are - Manu, Gomati, Muhuri, Pheni, Hawra, Juri, Deo, Khowai.

Twenty first January, 1972, Tripura has been declared as full-fledged state. According to 1981 census report total population of the state is -20,053,058. During a decade , from1971 to 1981 population has been increased by 31.55%. Till 1931 majority of total population are tribal people. During 51—52 population highly increases, specially because of refugee people who came from East Pakistan [present Bangladesh] . If thoroughly studied , areas adjacent to Unakoti

specially Dharmanagar and Kailashahar informations about inhabitants of these places can be gathered. A very rare published work –'Tripura Rajye Trish Batsar Dharmanagar Bibhag ' by Shri Brajendra Chandra Datta , published in 1972 by Tripura Education Dept. shows that apart from Manipuris and Halams also there are various communities like Nath, Debnath, Namasudra, Mali, Patni, Dhuli, Muchi also residing in Dharmanagar Bibhag [p—10] . People of Nath community even in present days can be seen in this area. Brajendra ch. Datta opines that these people are originally Buddhist as some scholars say [p—10] . Dr. Ranjit Dey writes in his book 'Tripurar Lokjeeban O Loksanskriti' , that in areas like Rangpur, Maimansing, Bakhargunj, Noakhali, Dhaka, Tripura many Nath yogis live in these areas . They worship 'Dharma thakur' as their major deity. This concept of Dharma thakur is also present in Unakoti and it has been discussed briefly in the chapter where religious significances of various stone images found at Unakoti are discussed. So, these Natha people may have some connection with Unakoti in the early ages.

2

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE REGION

Other tribal communities like Halam, Chakma, Reang etc. who reside in these areas are also important and their socio-cultural life is also discussed in the next chapter.

Unakoti is situated in North Tripura district . So it is very important to know the socio-economic condition of the region . Till 1992-93, Dhalai district remains as a part of North Tripura district . In the year 1994 North Tripura district has been divided into two districts and Dhalai has become a separate district . During 1992-93 , the socio-economic condition of undivided North Tripura district can be known from different sources . Entire North Tripura district is covered with hills, plain-lands, rivers and jungles . Important rivers are Manu, Dhalai, Deo, Juri and Langai. Noticeable ranges are Langtarai, Sakhan and Jampui . According to the census of 1991, the total area of the district covers an area of 3,544 sq.km. and it has a population of 6,97,330 persons . The sex ratio is 939 females per 1000 males . In context of caste and tribe, North Tripura

district [1992-93] has 13.39 % population belonging to scheduled caste and 28.39 % scheduled tribe . Coming to the context of working class the total picture of the district as in 1991 is 30.01% main workers, 2.51% marginal workers and 67.48% non workers. Out of the total main workers, 45.13% are cultivators, 17.32% agricultural labourers, 4.68% are engaged in live stock, forestry, fishing, hunting and plantations of orchards etc, 0.21% are engaged in mining and qurring, 1.31% are in manufacturing, servicing and repairs in household industry, 1.74% are in construction works, 6.96% are in trade and business, 2.82% in transport storage and communication and 16.53% are engaged in other services including government jobs . [ref:- Socio-economic condition of the people of North Tripura district [1992-93] , project paper by Sipra Paul , Enrolment no—948420639 of 1994 . Study centre-Dharmanagar Govt. Degree College . Guided by Dr. C.R. Nag] Searching for more information about socio-economic condition of the region in the early ages, if one looks at the history of the area, soon it can be understood that the main barrier is lack of recorded documents . Though there are very few published works which help researcher in this matter . Such a published work is 'Tripura Rajye Trish Batsar - Dharmanagar Bibhag' by Shri Brajendra Chandra Datta, published by Tripura Education Dept. in 1972 . Author completes his writing in 1929 . Some information about Dharmanagar Bibhag of that time can be collected from the work as the area is in North Tripura district and not very far

from Unakoti . As author writes in the book- non-tribal communities like Nath, Debnath, Nama-sudra, Mali, Patni, Dhuli, Muchi etc. are inhabitants of the area [p-10] . Tribal communities like Manipuri, Halam, Khasi etc. are also there [p-11] . Among these tribal communities Halams are very important as they are generally considered as ancestors of Kukis who are early inhabitants of this entire region . Author also writes about agriculture and cultivations of the area . In this Bibhag, peddies of different types are produced ,such as-Sailo, Bodo, Aush etc. Pulses like Kalai, Mung, Mas etc. are also produced . Different types of potato, sugar-canes, banana, lemon are produced in large numbers [p-17-18]. If further research is done in this field to know about the inhabitants and socio-political situation of the region then something can be known and in that case researcher has to depend on the early literatures . Such a literature told by Jayanta Chantai and written by Dbija Ramganga is 'Krishnamala' which is written about adventurous life of king Krishnamanikya . The book also tells about the tribal people named 'Kuki' who are early inhabitants of Unakoti and other adjacent areas . Period of the incidents written in these verses is 18th century A.D[1748-1783] . In Krishnamala there is description of a region called 'Purbakul' and the area is said to be in the southern bank of river 'Barabakra'[presently known as Barak] . 'Purbakul' area remains under Manikya rule and as a part of Tripura . Northern bank of Barabakra river - the entire area belongs to Kachar state or Herambadesh .

'Purbakul' area is inhabited by Kuki people . Also names of various Kuki clans are mentioned in Krishnamala , such as- Chhakacheb, Khamacheb, Charai, Rang-Rung, Rangkhal. Chaimeb, Chhatai, Chhaimar, Langai, Rupini, Telpei etc. In present North Tripura some places can be noticed which are named after Kuki names - Churaibari[actual name is Charaibari], Langai[river], Rang-Rung [near Kailashahar] etc. All the names are directly related to the names of Kuki clans . According to Krishnamala all these Kukis are known as 'Kirats' . Also great epic like Mahabharat tells the story of 'Kiratdesh' which is most probably the early name of this region . Also there are some descriptions of these people in Krishnamala . Poet draws a picture of Kuki warriors - they are almost naked, have their long hairs untied, hold open swords, bow and arrow . This is very similar to the 'Hunter panel' of Unakoti . Khuchung kukis offer their gifts like animals[cows, oxen] , horses, clothes, utensils made of copper, goats etc. to the Manikya king . So it is known that those things have been produced in the locality in early days .

More information about socio-economic condition of the region can be known from another very important book ' Tripur Desher Katha', edited by Shri Tripur Chandra Sen, Convener, Tripura regional records survey committee, Agartala, Tripura . The book is actually written in Assamese by two representatives of Ahome king Rudra Sinha , Ratna Kandali and Arjundas Bairagi in the year 1724 A.D . These two representatives visit Tripura and meet the king of Tripura - Raja Ratna manikya

Deb and later write about their visit . Some information about the discussed area are there in their writing . According to their description they reach Kashpur[Khashpur near Silchar] first, then move towards Tripura and after five days they came to the border of the two states – Kachar and Tripura . There is a river called Rupini from there they go to Rang-Rung and where they met the tribal inhabitants who were known as Kuki . These people have their own chief called 'Halamchha' . Under him, there are several workers called –Galim, Gabore, Chhapia, Dalai . Their life-style is very much similar to that of Nagas, though they do not take beef [described area is undoubtedly the area of North Tripura as the place Rang-Rung is still there near Kailashahar] . As they further write about the Kuki people - there lives a representative of Tripura king . Many things and vegetables are produced there like-betel-nut, pan, rice, pumpkin, bringel, cotton . People come from Kachar and Mekhli-desh[present Manipur] with various things like goat, duck, cock, dry-fish, rice, salt, oil, tobacco, betel-nut, gold, brass made utensils, clothes, horses etc. for sale . Rang-Rung is the centre of such export-import . From there both of them go to Rupini-para then to kumjang . From there they go to Chhairangchuk . According to their description from Rang-Rung to Chhairangchuk - the entire area is inhabited by Kuki people, there is a river in Chhairangchuk called Deo-gang [presently known as river Deo] . Through this river path they go to river Manu . So it is clear that pre mentioned places are in North Tripura and the place where Manu and Deo meet each-other is presently known as Fatikroy

and is also in North Tripura . [Information collected from Tripur Desher Katha , edited by Tripur Chandra Sen, published by Tribal Research Centre, Govt. of Tripura, p—36-38] .

So it can be known that in 18th century, Kuki people live in the area and they produces various fruits and vegetables .

Now it is important to know about the social life of the tribal people who reside in the area .

In this regard a very important published work can be taken as reference . That is an article –' Nature of Transition Among The Tribes of Tripura ' by Dr. Hirendra Kumar Sur, [published in research journal named 'Tui', by Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Tripura] . Dr. Sur writes in the article -" Of the tribal population the 'Tipperahs' formed the largest single group . Formerly they were divided in to four smaller groups such as [i]the Purans or Rajbangshi , [ii] the Nowatias [iii] the Jamatias and [iv] the Riangs . However, the order of the President of India passed in 1956, testifies to the existence of 19 scheduled tribes in Tripura and these are Lushai, Mogh, Kuki, Chakma, Garo, Chaimol, Halam, Khasia, Bhutia, Kunda[including Kaur], Orang, Lepcha, Santal, Bhil, Tripuri, Jamatia, Nowatia, Riang and Uchai "[p—42] .

Author also writes about their social customs as "Generally two types of marriage prevalent among the tribals of Tripura- 'Hiknanani' and 'Kaijagnani'. 'Hiknanani' is a marriage of mutual consent or choice. 'Kaijagnani' is a negotiated marriage where the parents play major roles . In early days, in 'Kaijagnani' system the groom had to work for a period of 2 or

3 years staying in the house of his would be father in law . If the groom could render his services to the satisfaction of all concerned, then the marriage would be solemnised, otherwise he would be paid a consolidated wage for the period of his services and asked to leave the family . It is also known as 'Jamai-Khata' or marriage by service . Thus it may also be called 'bride-price' paid the groom's family in cases where marriage would be solemnised . So 'Jamai-Khata' is assistance in agricultural activities rendered to the girl's house . The girl's father gets the bride-price as an indemnity for the economic loss of his family which he suffers with her departure. This system of marriage though not popular to-day as much as it was popular in the past, is not altogether abandoned and is still in vogue in the hills "[p-43-44] .

While discussing about their religious life one thing should be remembered that, tribal people have their own religious belief and some primitive practices like magic, sorcery etc. are still present in their religious life though in the early ages they have been converted in to Hindus . In this context opinion of Suchintya Bhattacharya should be mentioned -" Risley outlined four different methods of the convertion of the tribal people into various Hindu castes . It has been pointed out that sometimes the leading man of a tribal community enrol themselves as members of one of the distinguished caste order . Another criterion of becoming a Hindu is to employ Brahmin priests to officiate on their behalf in all socio-religious rites and practices . These Brahmins thus employed have not

hesitated even to create and record mythical stories mostly relate to tracing their ancestory from some renowned persons of that caste order. Another method by which the tribal people got themselves absorbed within the Hindu fold is to embrace any one of Hindu sectarian cults and thereby declare themselves as Vaishnavas, Lingayats etc. A typical instance may be cited with regard to the Rajvamsis of North Bengal who are distinctly of mongoloid origin but by adapting this very method have become a full-fledged Hindu caste . Finally, a whole tribe or a section of it may become Hindus by claiming so and observing certain Hindu rites without abandoning their tribal identity . The assimilation of Hindu cultural elements and pursuance of the Hindu ways of life by the tribal communities in Tripura has been a long drawn process . There is hardly any evidence of any kind of conscious efforts on either side . For the assimilation of Tribal peoples or for their entrance within the Hindu folds, the only instance of a deliberate attempt of denying tribal affiliation by the tribes of Tripura is to return themselves as Hindus during the census enumerations . But this was done without changing the tribal identity . There is nothing wrong on the part of the tribes of Tripura or the other tribes of North-East India to return themselves as Hindus because of the very fact that there exists hardly any fandamental difference between the tribal religion and popular Hinduism . But the return of the tribals as Hindus does not necessarily deprive them of their tribal origin and tribal cultural organisation. " [Ref:-The Momentum of Changes

in the Life-pattern of the Tribals of Tripura , published in 'Tui' -research journal, published by Tribal Research Institution , Govt. of Tripura]

Unakoti is generally considered as a Hindu pilgrimage, yet some tribal features can be seen in Unakoti sculptures . So, it can be assumed that the purpose is to preach Hindu religious doctrines among the tribal population of the area . As a result, though they become Hindus, they can not leave all their pre-fostered notions and ideas . So, a type of localization of Hinduism can be noticed at Unakoti .

Unakoti - according to the belief of Halam community .

[Based on a discussion with Mr. Byomkesh Halam, Bagbassa, North Tripura, dtd.-]

Mr. Byomkesh Halam is an old man of Halam community of JaithangBasti, Bagbassa . He is interested in Halam religion and culture . As he says that Halams are originally Kirati people and though they are Hindu they have their own religion called 'Kirati-dharma' . Unakoti has a major significance in their religious life . In recent days majority of Halam population have been Christians . Still there are some Hindu Halams who go to Unakoti twice a year to worship lord 'Shibrai'[Unakotiswar-Kalbhairab or central Shiba head] . As Mr. Halam says that images like tortoise have significant position in religious belief of Halams . According to their belief a pious man has to cross the river of life with the help of a boat made of tortoise-shell, tail of a crocodile becomes the paddle . In

this regard one thing should be mentioned that there is also a tortoise image at Unakoti . Pre-mentioned belief may have some connection with this image .

Halams calls the Ganesha images of Unakoti –Binayaka . They generally go to Unakoti to confess before the Gods for the mistakes and evil deeds they have done . He tells a mythological story related to Unakoti - once upon a time all the Gods and Goddesses decide to do something for the animals and Halam people so that they can live comfortably without any worry as live the birds and the fishes . But all Halam people and the other beings have been engaged in enjoying worldly things so much that they have no knowledge of such project taken by the Gods . One of the Gods going to them, tell about the matter and curse them for their ignorance. At that time a crow laughs at the Halam people and the others and as a result the God becomes much more angry because no joke or laughter is allowed when a divine function is going on . The crow is punished and all the Gods being annoyed leave the place . Ultimately their plan is abandoned. It is said that Unakoti is the place where the incident happens.

One thing can be understood from such story that once upon a time a planning is done by some royal or upper class people for welfare of local tribal people and those royal or upper class people have been the Gods in the story . However at last the plan has been abandoned because of some reason which takes the form of a crow in the tale.

Halams are early inhabitants of the region . Halams are originally the Kuki people . Pre-mentioned custom like Jamai-Khata is absent in the society of Kuki people, though in recent past it has been found in the social life of other tribes like Jamatia, Reang etc. Because Kuki people do not believe in such custom as they have been very ego-maniac, strong minded martial race in early ages . Sri Suren Debbarma writes about them in his book ' Tripurar Adibasi –Jeeban O Sanskriti' [published by Parul Prakasani, Agartala] that their social structure is free from rigidity in case of male-female relationship and even unmarried couple, if they have any physical relation before marriage, are allowed to marry each-other without any objection . [p-170]

Halams –though they are sub-tribe of Kuki community, they have the custom Jamai-Khata and most probably it is because of the influence that comes from other tribal societies [p-192]. In this context it should be mentioned that Halam community has been influenced by the Tripri tribe as it comes under Manikya rulers in recent past . For instance a sword and a khadga presented by Sri Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya to the Lang-Long clan of Halam community are still there in the collection of Sri Manikbul Halam of Noagang, North Tripura . Halam people generally like high hills as their home . Halam village is called 'Khu' . They build their houses with bamboo, wood etc. They call their houses as 'In' . Sifting cultivation is their main occupation and they call this process of cultivation –'Lou' . Peddy, Pumpkin, Cucumber etc. are produced . Apart

from this they are also interested in hunting also [p—187-188] . Though Halams are Kukis they have been influenced by Tripuri people as it is mentioned earlier . Kuki people have their own choice and life-style . They have a chief as ruler called 'Sangalthang' . They also produce fruits and vegetables by Jum cultivation like Halams [p—172] . Religion has a major significance in their life . In this context another interview[dtd.-4th Nov, 2002] should be mentioned which is of a Halam singer Mr. Jesua Halam of Noagang, North Tripura .

As he says that Hindu Halams often go to Unakoti to worship and he believes that Unakoti is a creation of Halam-Kuki people . Two artists from Kuki race are honoured as chief artists of Unakoti . They are Sri Kala and Rai Kala . Manikya kings of Tripura have no connection with the matter as he opines . Halams[Kuki indeed] believe in existence of various Gods and Goddesses as well as evil spirits . Also animistic ideas can be found in Halam philosophy . Major Gods and Goddesses of Halam community are - Arthuknai, Tuima, Sering-Artha, Lakumphai, Paengpha, Hachungma etc. [Informations are taken from 'Tripurar Adibasi Jeeban O Sanskriti' by Suren Debbarma, p—194-195] . Halams have their own religious festivals . Like other tribal communities Halams also believe in the existence of invisible spirits who should be propitiated for the welfare of men . They believe in re-birth . Popular Halam dance is 'Hai-Hak' dance .Halams worship Goddess Lakshmi . During reaping of the harvest they worship Goddess Lakshmi in their own way . To please

the deity they perform dance with music at the site of worship. The entire community both man and woman dance in a round form which has been their community dance .

Also there are some Reangs and Chakmas in North Tripura . Reangs though they are said to be foreigners may have some connection with Unakoti as they also take part in Unakoti festival . Chakmas come to Tripura years back, though the exact time is not found yet . Though they are Buddhists, some traits of animism can be found in their rites and rituals . Like along with Buddhist religious practices they also perform sacrifice to entertain the Goddess of water and other spirits . All these tribal communities have their own culture and traditions . Reang dance called 'Hojagiri' actually the dance of balance is evidence of their expertise and dedication . The equipments required for dance are earthen pitcher, small oil lamps, bottles, hankerships or flowers, Baileing[sort of big plate made of bamboo] and metal plates with dresses and ornaments .

Likewise Chakmas have their own religious festival called 'Bijhu' . Bijhu is the most important socio-religious festival of the Chakmas . This festival give birth to 'Bijhu' dance . Beginning on the day before the last day of Bengali calendar year, Bijhu lasts for three days . On the first day known as Phool Bijhu, household items and clothes are cleaned and washed, food items are collected and the house is decorated to give a new look with veil of different flowers . This custom

of cleaning and washing comes from Bengalee Sankranti festival and it shows how tribal people have been influenced by the culture of Bengal . This is also the fact in case of Unakoti. Later it will be discussed –how tribal people are influenced by Bengal art and culture . Now the last day of Bijhu called 'Gojjepojje' Bijhu is also celebrated through socio-religious activities . Chakmas also have other religious festivals like - Thanmana, Burapar Puja, Chumulang etc. In Bijhu dance group of dancers take part and they make a square form turning circular at times . Dhul[drum], Baajhi[flute], Hengarang[a bamboo made instrument], Dhuduk[another bamboo made instrument] are used to accompany the Bijhu dance and song . Female performers wear traditional 'Pinon', 'Khadi' and silver ornaments ; while male dancers wear dhoti, sort of jacket made of traditional cloth and 'Khabang' [headgear] .

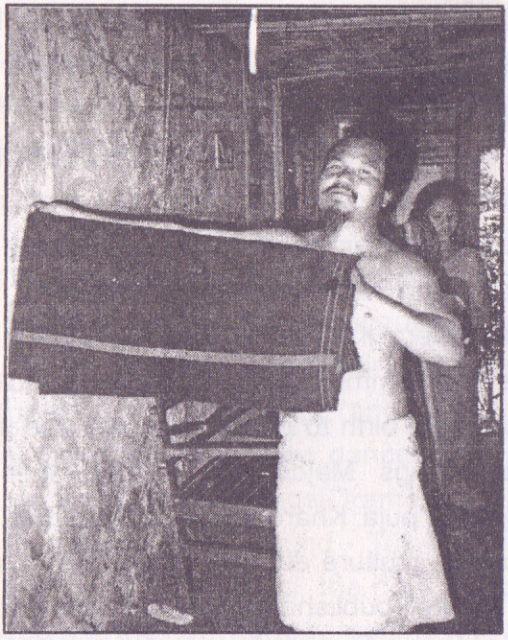
Other tribal groups of Kuki origin reside in this part of Tripura such as - Darlong, Lushai etc. Lushais do not indentify themselves as Lushai, but as Mizo . Because the word Lushai means head-hunter as it has been their early custom . They are concentrated in Jampui Tlang[Range] of North Tripura district . They also have their own dances like 'Khwallam' . For this dance small brass gongs[Dramong in Lushai] are beaten to give the presumed sound - Tuk boh boh, tuk boh boh . Keeping in tune with sound, the right leg takes a side step and moves with the right hand spreading with a traditional piece of cloth and then lower the body a little . This will be followed by left side move . There are several forms in this dance namely – (1) Kaltluang, (2) Kalthelh, (3) Arpui

Chawmthau, (4) Vasirlen, (5) Vakawl len, (6) khupsuk, (7) Saila winu, (8) Tuipuikhang tan, (9) Ar Khawthim dai and (10) Kawlngo len .

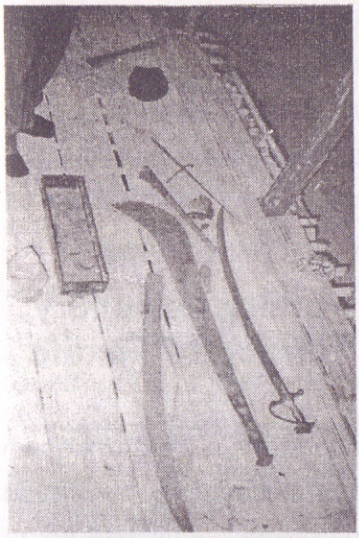
Another important tribal group is Darlong . They live in the areas which are very adjacent to Unakoti . Noonchhera, Baithangbari areas are inhabited mostly by Darlong people . Darlongs are sub-tribe of Lushai community . They are presently concentrated in Dharmanagar, Kanchanpur, Kailashahar . Their main occupation is cultivation of pineapple, orange and cotton . Their traditional rites and rituals are ignored presently as 99% of their population is christianised . Their popular dances are Cheraw, Zetluang etc. In Cheraw dance rythm is the main aspect . This dance is performed so that a pregnant woman can get some confidence as Darlong people think that all human beings are to die one day and the pregnant woman of the community becomes afraid of traveling the path towards heaven because of her physical unability , thinking that she may die during her pregnancy .

Also there are several Kuki clans - Rupini, Kaipeng, Molsoom etc. All these tribal communities have their own socio-religious customs which give birth to pujas, worships and the dances related to these things . Major festivals of the tribes of Tripura are Garia puja, Ker puja, Kharchi puja etc. [Informations about tribal life ,society , culture etc. are taken from 'Dances and Festivals of Tripura', published by I.C.A.T , govt. of Tripura.]

Byomkesh Halam with his family, Bagbasa, North Tripura.



Jesua Halam with his family, Noagang, North Tripura.



Sword and Khadaga presented to Lang-Long clan of Kuki race by Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur

Manikbul Halam with his family, Noagang, North Tripura.

3

ARTS OF TRIPURA —— Pottery, Jewellery, Bamboo and cane crafts, Terracotta, Textile .

The state of Tripura has been enriched even from unknown past with various art forms . These art traditions may be divided in to two parts . Some art traditions are still alive and some are lost . Jewellery, Bamboo and cane crafts, Textile etc. belong to first group and Pottery, Terracotta are of the second. Firstly living art traditions can be discussed .

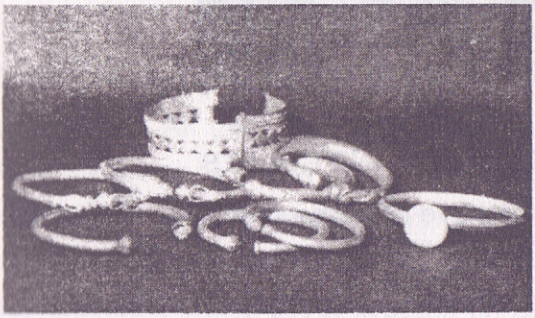
JEWELLERY

Tribes of Tripura have their traditional ornaments made of silver generally . All the communities wear almost similar ornaments though they call these by different names . For an instance a particular type of neck-less

Made of silver coins or sometimes of coin-shaped rounded metal forms is a common ornament of all the tribes . All the communities like Reang, Halam, Chakma, Uchoi etc. use this neck-less . Halams call this 'Dankari' while Chakmas call it 'Tenga-sora' . But basic pattern of neck-less remains the same. The neck-less is basically juxtaposition of some rounded

forms. Chakmas wear other ornaments like ear-rings called 'Han O Baja'. 'Jhumuli', ornaments for feet called 'Tengat Haru'. Designs in the ornaments have a special type . Designs are simple and basically geometrical forms . Rhombus, circle, straight lines become designs for tribal ornaments as it can be noticed in tribal textile also . Reang, Chakma ornaments show rhombus like motifs while in Kuki ornaments straight lines parallely organised can be seen . Small bids can be observed in tribal ornaments also . Sometimes floral motifs are seen . Beautiful floral motifs are found in the ornaments of Rupini who are sub-tribe of Halam-Kuki .

Jesua Halam with Traditional - Dankari Mala.



Traditional Halam Ornaments

Halam woman with Dankari Mala and Traditional Ornaments.

Halam woman with ornaments on upper portions of ears.

Reang woman bearing traditional ornaments.

BAMBOO AND CANE CRAFTS

Bamboo and cane-crafts have been the speciality of the craft work of Tripura . Government also has taken various projects to encourage local craftsmen . In 1989, a directorate is

established for development of handicraft . Craft works are being exported also and appraised both in India and abroad . Generally craftsmen of Tripura make various beautiful things for interior decoration —— wall-hangings, pen stands, candle stands, lampshades, room partitions, ash trays and so many things . Tribal taste and traditions are reflected in these craft works . Also they make various forms with root of bamboo that reminds us of 'Katum-Kutum' of Abanindranath Tagore . In the art of bamboo craft some particular design, patterns and forms are repeatedly used . Fine straight bamboo sticks are parallely placed to create designs in mats, partitions, wall-hangings etc. Also some floral motifs are used . Geometric designs are also seen . Apart from these things tribal craftsmen make different types of flutes, musical instruments which are used at the time of traditional festivals and pujas . Various instruments like 'Sarinda', 'Chong-preng', 'Samu'[flute] are made in tribal society . Also there are some superb cane-crafts which are various cane made furnitures like chair, table etc. All these are made following tribal taste . Designs like stripes, rounded and spiral motifs can be seen in the works .

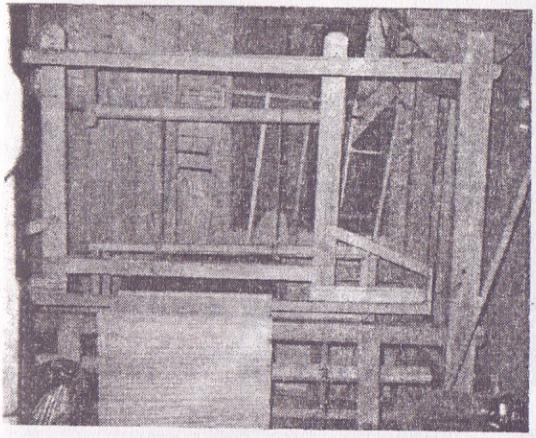
TEXTILE

Tribes of Tripura have an unique form in this art of making costumes . All the tribes generally make their clothes with their own hands . They have weaving machines made of bamboo or wood . Generally tribal dresses have two parts - one is a long designed cloth to cover lower portion of body and the other is to cover breasts [in case of female] . The

lower garment is called 'Pachra' and upper is 'Ria' or 'Risa' . 'Pachra's of all the communities are similar in case of design though every group has own likings and taste in composing them . Way of composing these designs on 'Pachra's of one community differs from that of the other . But basically designs and motifs remain the same . Parallel stripes - almost all the tribes use this particular design to decorate their garments . Such parallel stripes are commonly seen in the garments of Tripuri, Reang, Chakma, Lushai, Halam, Khasia, Bhutia, Lepcha, Munda, Rupini, Koloi and Darlong people . Sometimes these stripes are composed in horizontal order and sometimes in vertical . Tripuri, Reang, Halam, Chakma, Rupini costumes are designed with horizontal stripes and Darlong, Lushai garments are with vertical stripes though exception is always there . Sometimes body of garment remains plain and there are stripes in the border . Borders are decorated with other designs and motifs like geometric forms - rhombus, triangle, rectangle etc. and other motifs like floral motifs, 'S' like motifs . There are some triangular motifs composed in a series in the border of Chakma costume and they call it 'Samlej' . Then the fine parallel stripes - they call these as 'Herang' . Chakmas call their costume 'Hadi' . Halams also have their particular designs . They wear kind of 'pagri' or head-gear called 'Kamchha' or 'Lokom' . Their Ria orRisa - the breast cover has designs called 'Thangnang bor' and 'Kwapar' on it . 'Kwapar' - the word means, flower of betel-nut . This shows how tribal art has been influenced by natural elements as

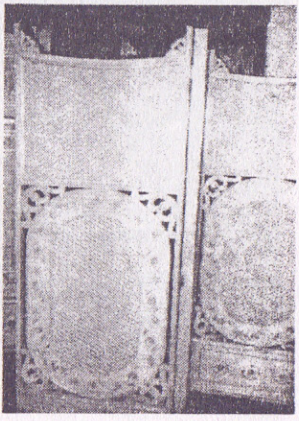
betel-nuts are produced in the region in large numbers . Halam Pachra or lower garment has another designs called 'Nikni Am Dum' and 'Amra Bukip' .

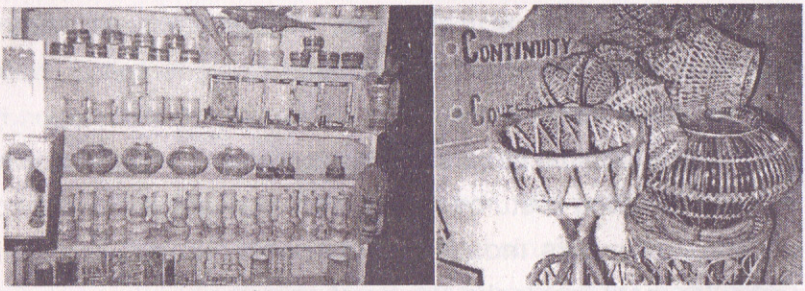
Garments of Lushai people are designed with vertical stripes as it is in Darlong costumes . Between two vertical lines there is series of motifs mostly geometrical - rhombus, and a particular motif that looks like tip of an arrow .



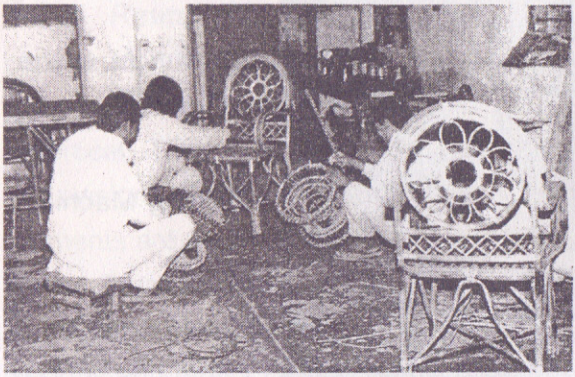
Knitting Machine

Bamboo and Cane Craft.

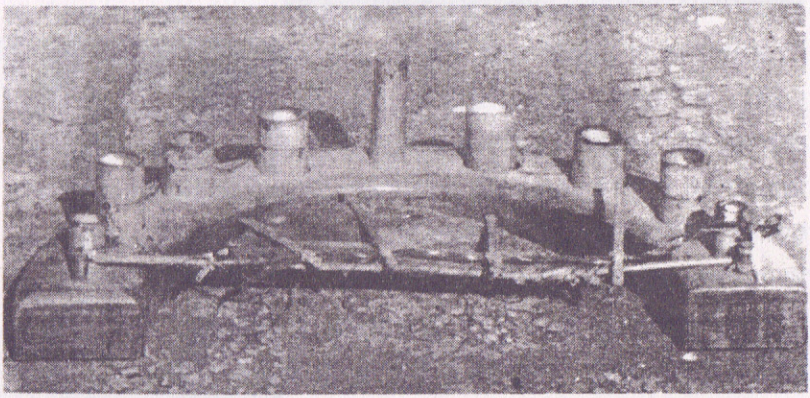




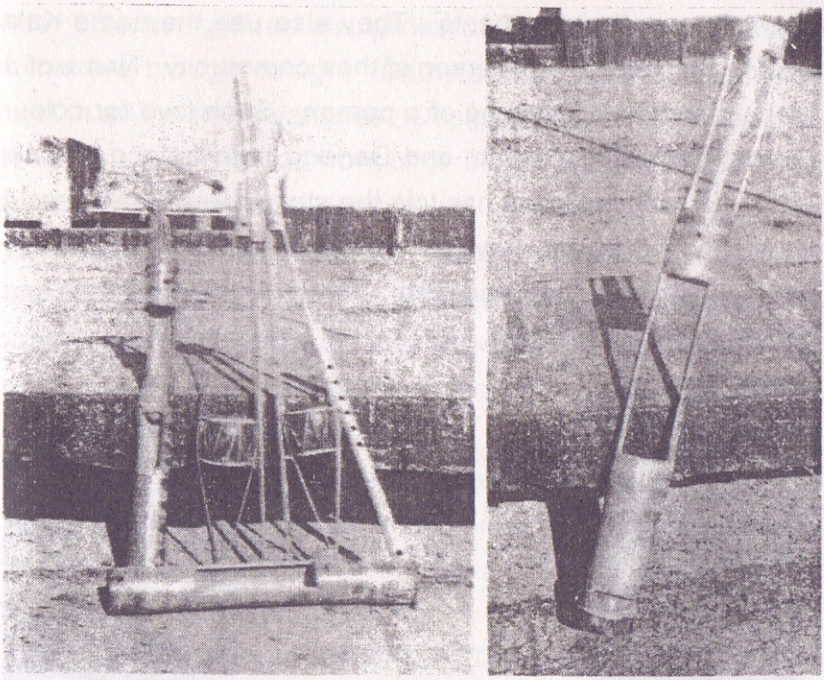
Bamboo and Cane craft.



Cane craft - Furnitures



Musical Instrument made of Bamboo



Musical Instrument made of bamboo

Tribal males wear a piece of cloth to cover lower portion of body [up to knee] . Designs on it are like designs of female garments .

Actually parallely drawn stripes are main designs of tribal costumes . In border the area is decorated with geometric motifs like triangle, rhombus etc. composed in a systematic order . These motifs are repeatedly used .

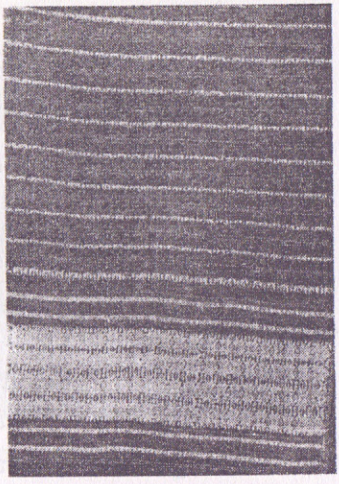
Tribal costumes are colourful as they generally like bright colours - vermilion red, black, white, yellow, ochre, deep green etc. Darlongs have a weakness for black and they often use

the colour in their garments . They also use the name Kala [black] as name of any person of their community . Name of a colour becomes the name of a person . Such love for colour is really amazing . Halam and Darlong both belong to Kuki race . Mr. Jesua Halam has told the story about Unakoti as it is mentioned in the previous chapter and according to the story artists who have worked at Unakoti are — Shri Kala and Rai Kala .

Lushai girl vertically costume

Chakma Dress

Chakma garment called Hadi.



After discussing three disciplines of Tripura art some major points are brought to light . Some common stylistic features exist in all the three varieties . Design- whether it is made on ornament or in bamboo work or on cloth - pattern remains the same . These common designs are - parallely drawn stripes, geometric forms like rhombus, triangle, circle etc. Tribal taste can be realized from these . This taste of designing can be observed also in the art of Unakoti which proves that Unakoti art is somehow related to tribal people . The matter will be discussed in later chapter .

After discussing three art traditions which still survive now it is necessary to mention other arts which though lost to-day but have been practiced in unknown past . Terracotta and the art of pottery are such art traditions .

TERRACOTTA

Specimens of terracotta art found at different places of the state show how advanced the artists are in early ages . Important collections of these are in Tripura State Museum, Agartala and Rajendra Kirtishala, Joynagar, Agartala . Mr. Jahar Acharjee owner of Rajendra Kirtishala has collected a large number of terracottas and he is interested in the matter. He writes in an article 'Terracottas of Tripura', published in 'Rajendra Kirtishala', 1970-95, silver jubilee commemorative volume - " The Tripura terracottas are found in different sizes. But generally they are of 8 inches x 6 inches size . They are of the following descriptions — (1) ornamental lotus leaves, (2) running deer, (3) lions, the royal insignia, (4) elephants

and camels, (5) the figure of Hanuman(?), (6) flowers and leaves etc. It may be specifically stated that these were creations of the later part of the fifteenth century . The art was practiced in abundance during the reign of Dhanyamanikya . - the wave of architectural style and the terracotta art of the greater Bengal knocked also the state . It is not, therefore, possible to discuss terracottas of Tripura to the exclusion of greater Bengal . There was unavoidable influence of greater Bengal on terracottas of Tripura ." A particular form of lion commonly seen in Tripura terracottas is a important matter . Similar lions are found in Unakoti relief . Some terracotta plaques collected in Tripura State Museum of 8th- 9th century show features — flexibility, motion of Gupta art whereas terracottas of later period [16th-17th] show different stylistic features which are similar to the art of Ahome period. Forms become more stylized and decorative .

Terracotta of Tripura has been influenced by Bengal terracottas.

In Bengal, artists like to wok with clay because of it's availability. No hard medium like stone is available in the plains of Bengal. Therefore Bengal artists have been experts in doing such job. Tripura terracottas have followed Bengal style in this matter . There is hardly any formal relation between stone sculptures found at Tripura [except some woks of later period] and terracottas of the same place . Forms of terracotta art of later period have been highly animated and folkish in appearance.

POTTERY

Some specimens of pottery are found here and there in the state but these are not very much significant in this connection . In Mainamati of Bangladesh[which is in Comilla district], large numbers of potteries are found . South-west Tripura is very adjacent to the place . In north Tripura some badly broken specimens are found . It can be understood that in the early ages the art has been practiced in the state .

Terra Cotta
Plaque, Pilak.

Terra Cotta
Plaque, Pilak.

Terra Cotta Plaque, Pilak

Terra Cotta Plaque, Pilak

Terra Cotta Plaque, Pilak

4

Sculpture
ROCK ARTS OF TRIPURA

Rock art, the only form selected, displayed, nurtured since ages by the Man (the culture bearing animal) preferable on natural canvas of isolated terrain within certain geo-climatic locations is turn to be a composite text. The content analysis of such art form not only portray the classical thought of these participatory communities but also reflect their aesthetical inquisitiveness in creating the artistic skills.

There are several varieties of rock art created in different periods in our country. All these art works can be divided into three catagories - (i) Painted rock art, (ii) Engraved rock art, (iii) both painted and engraved rock art. Rock arts of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh can be considered as earliest instance of painted and painted engraved rock art. There are several engraved rock arts in our country which are made on living stones. Amongst such specimens works of Ellora, Mahabalipuram can be mentioned. In north-eastern India, also there are some very important archaeological spots which are

full of engraved rock arts created in different periods. Tripura as a small state of Eastern India also has some archaelogical spots which are full of ancient rock arts specially of engraved variety. These art works are of two types - (i) relief made on the surface of living rock and (ii) detached steles with high relief images on them.

In this particular field, artists and carvers of ancient Tripura have showed their expertise and originality . Evidences are scattered in different places of Tripura like Pilak Pathar[south Tripura], Udaipur [south Tripura] {all the specimens are in Tripura State Museum }, Deotamura[south Tripura] and above all at Unakoti [north Tripura] .

Location :

1. Pilak Pathar :- (South Tripura District)
2. Deotamura :- (South Tripura District)
3. Udaipur :- (South Tripura District)
4. Sonamura :- (West Tripura District)
5. Unakoti :- (North Tripura District)

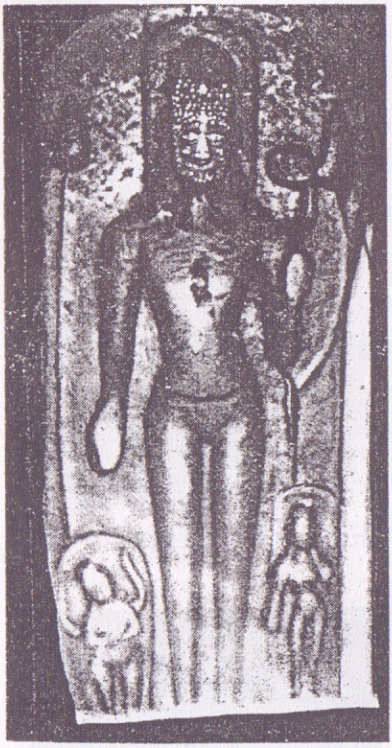
PILAK

Pilak pathar the important archaeological spot of the state is situated in south Tripura District. It is at a distance of 98 km from capital town Agartala. Numerous sculptures made of stone, bronze and also terracotta plaques are found of Pilak. Antiquities of Pilak area are related to both Hinduism and Tantric Buddhism (8^{th} -10^{th} c.A.D). Surjya images found in the locality deserve special mention. Apart from these, Mahish mardinis of Sagardheba, Thakuranitila (8^{th} -9^{th} c.A.D) Ganeshas of Club tila, Thakuranitila area

Surya, 10th Century, Pilak

Surya, 10th Century, Pilak

Ganesha, 9th-10th Century, Pilak



Avolokiteswar,
10th Century, Pilak

Six Armed Deity
(Marichi ?)

Mahish-Mardini, 9th-10th
Century, Pilak

Shiba, 8th Century, Pilak

Buddha, 10th Century,
Pilak

Chunda, 10th Century,
Pilak

Chunda, 10th Century,
Pilak

(10^{th} -11^{th} c) are the important stone sculptures reflected age old Hinduism of that time. At the same time various images of Tantric Buddhist Gods and Goddesses are also found in the area. Buddha, chunda (10^{th} c), Avolokiteswar (8^{th} -9^{th} c) Marichi (9^{th} c) made of stone and Tara Avolokiteswar,hariti etc. made of bronze are such Buddhist images . Style of Pilak sculptures is related to the style prevalent in Bengal during 9^{th} ,10^{th},11^{th} centuries.

Images carved in high relief on stele of 9^{th} ,10^{th}, 11^{th} ,12^{th} centuries have been found in large numbers in different places of Eastern India

During this period the particular form of stone sculptures has been very popular and trend of carving im age on rectangular stone tablets with either rounded or pointed arch like tops can be noticed. Pilak sculptures are also products of such period . Advancement in Bengal or Kamrup of that period has been the source of inspiration and local carvers being inspired more particularly influenced try to do in the same manner. But lack of technical skill and non-availibility of stones of better quality do not allow them to achieve the qualities and perfection of Pala-Sena artists. As a result the statues have been heavy , rigid and sometimes folkish in appearance. Six-armed Buddhist female deity found at Pilak Jolai bari region though carved on stone following the style of eastern Indian school is very much folkish in character.Carving style is also very much local. Buddha images collected from the same region are somehow stylistically superior. Buddhist images of the same

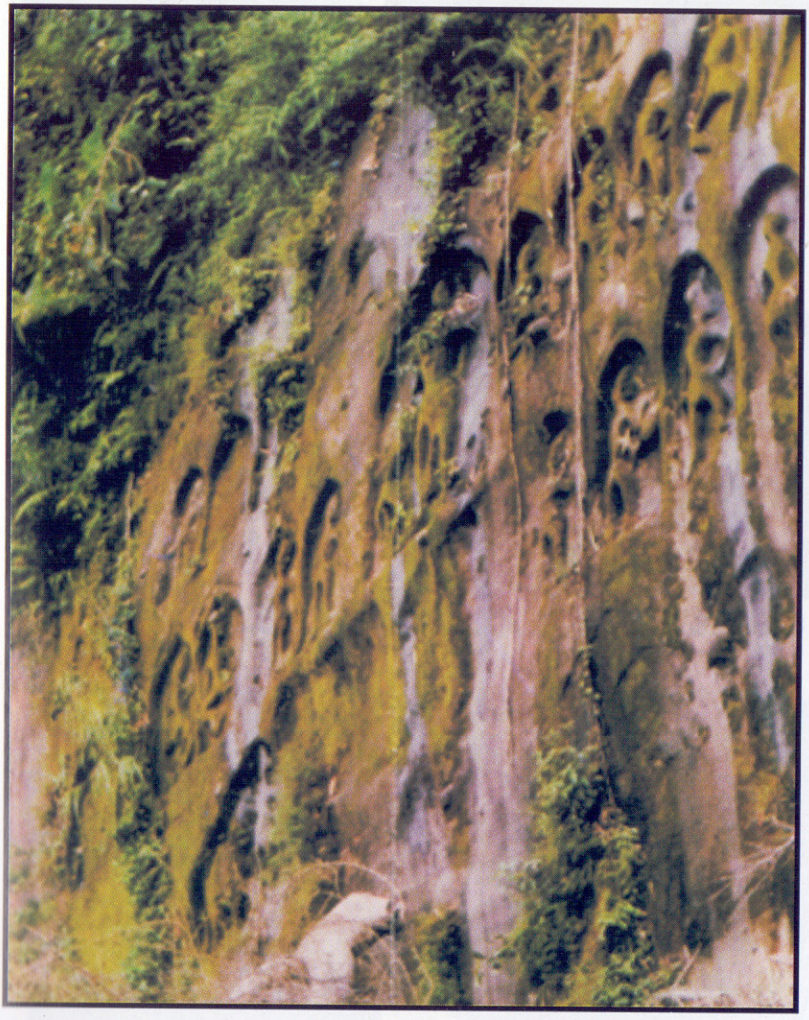
period found at Jhewari of Chattagram(Bangladesh) are of similar nature . Pilak sculptures often show disproportionate limbs, weak structure of body and roughly finished surface. Less developed areas of Pilak(south Tripura), Chattagram(Bangladesh) etc. have been influenced by art and culture of well cultured inhabitants of the main land of Bengal. An honest but unsuccessful endeavour to imitate socalled mediaeval Pala style can be noticed in the works of Pilak region.

Deotamura

This is the another very important archaeological spot in Tripura situated at the southern part of Barmura Hill range. This place is enriched with some very unique rock carving of Hindu Gods and Goddesses. All these relief images found here have been carved frontally on rock wall just beside river Gomati. Significant works are some relief panels carved in low relief and these are more or less bordered with either straight engraved lines creating square forms or very conventionally carved arches like formations. Important panels are the panel of five deities, panel showing thirty seven figures and the colossal image of Mahish mardini. The panel of five deities is very significant as there is already a living tradition of worshipping five deities generally known as Panchopasana. It is difficult to say whether there is a connection between this panel and the custom of Panchopasana or not. The main deity is probably Bishnu(1.50mt) placed in the centre of the whole composition. Other four images are carved on the four sides

of the central one. Above all there is the image of Siva probably (2.20mt). On the right side there is an image of Kartikeya(1.35mt) probably. While on the left there is Ganesha(2.40mt) with his bahana as usual. Just below the central image four armed Goddess is there. Baishnabite faith can be seen as the panel shows Bishnu as the central deity. Each figure is carved within engraved squarish boundary. The whole composition is bordered with a engraved formation which has a multifoiled arch at the top. Other panel show thirty seven figures perhaps pilgrims taking part in religious procession. All these are carved in low relief.

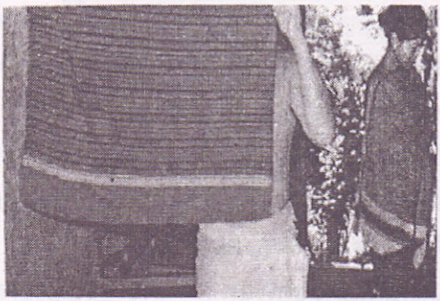
The most important rockcut image of Deotamura is tha image of Mahish-Mardini. The ten armed mother Goddess. The relief image is 13mtrs. high(45ft). This one is at a distance of almost 1.5 km from the prementioned works. It shows rounded calm face, broad strong shoulder and stands in Pratyalidha attitude. Upper portion of the body shows minimum rounded volume atleast. But the hands and lower portion are carved rigidly. No attempt to make them soft and lively can be seen. The Mahishasur carved under her feet is also made in the same manner. Presence of multifoiled arch in Deotamura relief is significant. It is considered as feature adopted from the arts of Muslim period. Sculptures both relief and single pieces of Ahom-Manikya period often show the particular feature. But this is very weak reason for giving them a place in Manikya period. Also there are some specimens of pre-Ahom period which show such arch like forms even multifoiled arches. For



PANEL OF THIRTY SEVEN DEITIES,
DEOTAMURA

Pancha Devta,
Deotamura

Mahish-Mardini, Deotamura



HORIZONTALLY DESIGNED
HALAM, COSTUME

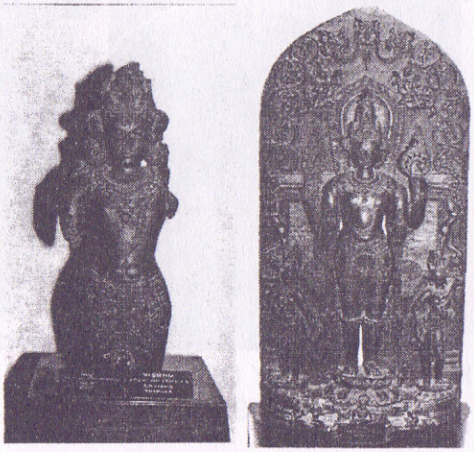
HORIZONTALLY DESIGNED
HALAM, COSTUME

TRIBLE GIRL WEAVING
HER CLOTH

instance Nataraj, Ganesha,Kartikeya panel ASM 1977, 9TH – 10TH c AD.collected in Assam state museum Guwahati. Rather the composition of the panel of five deities can be compared to the basic composition of Umalingana murti'ASM 1432 collected from Ujan bazaar, Guwahati which is of pre-Ahom period. It is difficult to determine the actual period when influence of Islamic art reaches the region of Tripura.

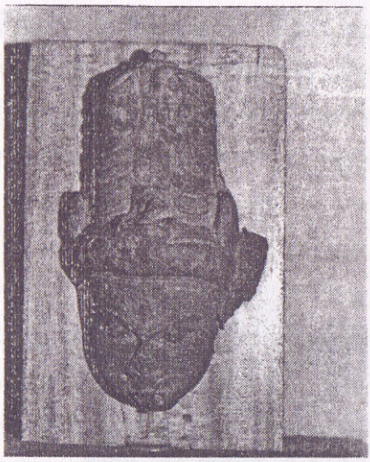
Udaipur

Fine images carved on black stones are found at Udaipur of south Tripura. Stylistically the works have a close connection with Pala style of Bengal. It is difficult to say whether they are carved locally or imported from Bengal. It is possible that these are products of Bengal School and brought to this region of Tripura by migrated people. The icons are mainly of Bishnu, Umamahashwar. All the sculptures cerved in the style of 11th centuryBengal school are now in Tripura State Museum, Agartala.



Bishnu, 11th Century, Udaipur

Uma-Maheswar,
11th Century,
Udaipur



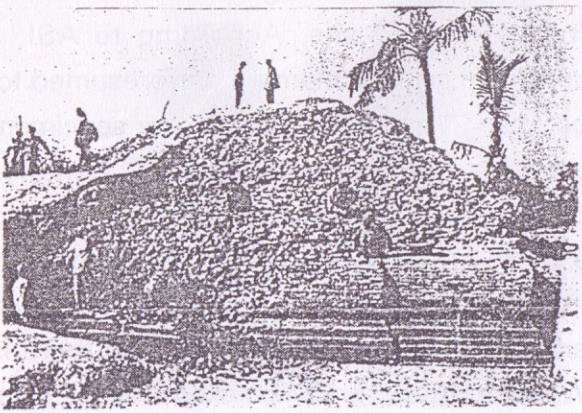
Shiba, 11th Century,
Udaipur

Sonamura

Ruins of ancient Buddhist architecture havebeen found recently at Boxanagar under Sonamura sub-division of West Tripura. A fine stone image of Mahakal has also been collected from the same site. According to ASI, allarchitectural constructions of Sonamura are presumed to be constructed between 9th and 12th c AD. the rock specimens of Udaipur are probably produced following 11th century's Bengal Art . Specimens of Pilak Pathar are of different periods - 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th centuries and they stylistically follow the style of those periods as the styles also have been practiced in Bengal and other areas of North India . So there is no speciality . Whereas in the art of Unakoti kind of uniqueness can be

observed . So Unakoti sculptures should be discussed with great importance . The whole study has different aspects . All these aspects of Unakoti art are going to be discussed in this chapter .

Mahakal, 11th-12th Century, Sonamura



Stupa Architecture, Boxanagar, Sonamura

UNAKOTI

The most important archaeological spot of the state is Unakoti, situated in the North Tripura district. It is at a distance of 180km from capital town Agartala. The most authentic report about Unakoti is annual report of ASI (1921-22). According to the report –" The existence of this interesting group of antiquities was first brought to the notice of this Department in 1914 by Captain Williams, then political agent to Tripura. Besides a Bengali pamphlet recently published by Mr Debbarman of the Botanical survey, there are no other publications referring to Unakoti. The Rajmala, a Bengali metrical history of the Trpura Raj family contains two or three reference to the visits of some of the Tripura rajas to this holy place . The name Unakoti(which is also applied to another well known holy place in Assam , viz Viswanath in Tezpur district) means one less than a crore and the propriety of donating a tirtha by this name will be apparent when it is remembered that Kashi or Benares , the holiest of all holy place is the only koti tirtha (either because it is supposed to contain emblems within its boundaries or because of its outstanding religious mertit), all other places,however successful in emulating it, falling just short of the crore."

The only epigraphic discovery at Unakoti is known from the same report. An inscription has been noticed at Unakoti. Couple of lines are inscribed on a chaturmukha linga and one of them mentions a name - 'Sri Jayadeva', most probably, donor of the particular linga. These are 11th -12th century

patterns of Bengali script as reported by A.S.I. Therefore, it is clear from this inscription that during the period (11th -12th century) some specimens of Unakoti have of course been carved. And people/artists came from Bengal to take part in religious as well as artistic activities.

Prior to the detailed study, it is necessary to record all the found objects. The list of found object is given herewith.

	Title	Place of Collection	Type of Sculpture
1.	Central Shiba head with two goddesses riding their bahans	Unakoti	Relief
2.	Head called Rudra Shiba	Unakoti	Relief
3.	Shiba with untied hair	Unakoti	Relief
4.	Male deity called 'Soumya Shiba'	Unakoti	Relief
5.	Dancing female deity on a decorated seat and a partly broken head	Relief	
6.	Seated female deity with her seat	Unakoti	Relief
7.	Partly broken deity	Unakoti	Relief
8.	Broken face	Unakoti	Relief

SHIBA WITH UNTIED HAIRS

9.	Partly broken peacock under the deity with bow and arrow	Unakoti	Relief
10.	Mukhalinga with two faces	Unakoti	Single piece
11.	Breasts / lingas	Unakoti	Relief
12.	Ekamukhalinga	Unakoti	Single piece
13.	Beast engraved on stone	Unakoti	Drawing
14.	Beast with human head	Unakoti	Relief
15.	Beast (only legs are seen)	Unakoti	Relief
16.	Upper portion of a broken head	Unakoti	Relief
17.	Hunter panel	Unakoti	Relief
18.	Ganesha panel (three Ganeshas and Bishnu image)	Unakoti	Relief
19.	Gigantic male deity	Unakoti	Relief
20.	Female deity seated in 'Bhadrasan'	Unakoti	Relief
21.	Shiba Parbati	Unakoti	Single piece
22.	Uma maheswar	Unakoti	Single piece
23.	Pedestal	Unakoti	Single piece
24.	Chaturmukhalinga	Unakoti	Single piece
25.	Tortoise	Unakoti	Single piece
26.	Standing deity trampling someone with left leg	Unakoti	Single piece
27.	Deity with five heads		

	and bow (Bhairab?)	Unakoti	Single piece
28.	Deity with bow and arrow	Unakoti	Relief
29.	Standing deity	Unakoti	Single piece
30.	Bull (broken)	Unakoti	Single piece
31.	Mukhalinga	Unakoti	Single piece
32.	Upper portion of a mukhalinga	Unakoti	Single piece
33.	Tortoise	Unakoti	Single piece
34.	Fish	Unakoti	Relief
35.	Bull	Unakoti	Single piece
36.	Bull	Unakoti	Single piece
37.	Birth of Hanuman	Unakoti	Single piece
38.	Ganesha	Unakoti	Single piece
39.	Bull (broken)	Unakoti	Single piece
40.	Two animals above Ganesha panel	Unakoti	Single piece
41.	Chaturmukhalinga showing three deities	Unakoti	Single piece
42.	Standing deity	Unakoti	Single piece
43.	Uma maheswar	Unakoti	Single piece
44.	Two heads (male and female)	Unakoti	Single piece
45.	Flowers	Unakoti	Single piece
46.	Standing deity	Unakoti	site museum
47.	Broken piece	Unakoti	Single piece
48.	Broken lower portion		

GANESHA WITH FOUR ARMS

CENTRAL SHIBA WITH TWO FEMALE
DEITIES RIDING THEIR BAHANAS

	of a statue	Unakoti	Single piece
49.	Female deity	Unakoti	Single piece
50.	Deity with protruded belly	Unakoti	Single piece
51.	Male figure (broken)	Unakoti	Single piece
52.	Shibalinga	Unakoti	Single piece
53.to55.	Shibalinga	Unakoti	Single piece
56.	Broken piece	Unakoti	Relief
57.	Tridents on the column beside central head	Unakoti	Relief
58.	Broken female figure	Unakoti	Relief
59.	Head(Buddha?)	Unakoti	Relief
60.	Head	Unakoti	Relief
61.	Head showing eye brows	Unakoti	Relief
62.	Beast (Tiger?Pig?)	Unakoti	Relief
63.	Head	Unakoti	Relief
64.	Container in Hunter panel	Unakoti	Drawing only
65.	The design	Unakoti	Relief
66.	Portion of female figure	Unakoti	Part of relief
67.	Broken form(Fish?Bird?)	Unakoti	Relief
68.	Peacock (in detail)	Unakoti	Relief
69.	Head gear perhaps decorated with bones	Unakoti	Relief

All these specimens have been noticed by researcher during the study and yet there are numerous specimens in the area which are to be unearthed .

Now various stylistic features of the sculptures are to be discussed .

Analysis of various stylistic features of rock-cut relief and sculptures of Unakoti

STUDY OF JATAMUKUTAS, CROWNS AND OTHER FEATURES :-

Entire Unakoti area takes a very long time to be fully constructed . The major portion of Unakoti relief is made during 11th century . A particular type of Jatamukuta or crown can be noticed in Unakoti sculptures which has a formal relation with that of 10th –12th century crowns . If the crowns are observed specially then it can be seen that same pattern is available in 11th century Bengal-Bihar art . This type of crown is also seen in 12th century . The types of Jatamukuta as described in 'Siva in art, literature and thought' by Shantilal Nagar show that the Jatamukutas of 5th—7th or 9th—10th century have blunt tops . But 11th century specimens show pointed tops . Jatamukutas of the deities of Chaturmukha linga (Unakoti) are with pointed tops . And also the crown of Ganesha with four arms at Unakoti has a pointed top . S.I. Nagar has studied the evolution of the forms of Jatamukutas and shows various patterns of Jatamukutas of different periods . From 11th century, Jatamukutas start showing sharp and pointed tops and a particular designal pattern which has rhythm of some linear

forms placed vertically first , then horizontally and then vertically again . Such order of motifs can be observed in some of the crowns of Unakoti . So it can be seen that some of the Unakoti crowns are stylistically similar to the crowns of 11th, 12th centuries . It can be understood that there is an influence of 11th-12th century Bengal art on Unakoti, though Unakoti relief do not follow Pala-Sena school of art . Just taking some stylistic features from Pala-Sena art Unakoti style of carving has been formed in a different way . Also influences of Tibetian art, art of Thailand and other south-east Asian countries are seen in Unakoti .

After the study it can be understood that Ganesha image at Unakoti bears a Jatamukuta or crown of 10th—12th century pattern . And also Chaturmukha linga shows the similar Jatamukuta . So both the works Chaturmukha linga and the relief image of Ganesha are made in same period as it is assumed . But there lies the difference, of course stylistic, between the relief image of Ganesha and the Chaturmukha linga . Chaturmukha linga images are carved in typical 11th-12th century style which can be seen in Bengal or Bihar during Pala-Sena period . Whereas in case of relief work , an inferior carving style is found , at the same time typical 11th-12th century crown of Bengal – Bihar art is noticed . So at the same time two different features are noticed in the relief image of Ganesha (four armed)—(1)typical Mukuta of 11th, 12th centuries (2)inferior carving style which has no connection with the style of that time . An admixture of Pala-Sena feature and local

carving style is noticed in the sculpture . From iconographical point of view it can be observed that in the period between 10th and 11th century, there comes a trend of making Ganesha images with six or eight arms in Bengal . For instance, a list of such images is mentioned below .

(1) Dancing Ganesha[six armed], {Indian Museum, Kolkata}
11th century A.D , Jangipara, North Bengal .

(2) Dancing Ganesha[eight armed], {Indian Museum}
12th century A.D, Sena school, North Bengal .

(3) Dancing Ganesha[with more than four arms], {No-636, Asutosh
Museum of Indian Art, Kolkata},

(4) Dancing Ganesha[eight armed], {No-672,Asutosh Museum}
10th-11th century, Rajshahi, Bangladesh .

(5) Dancing Ganesha{No-127,Asutosh Museum}

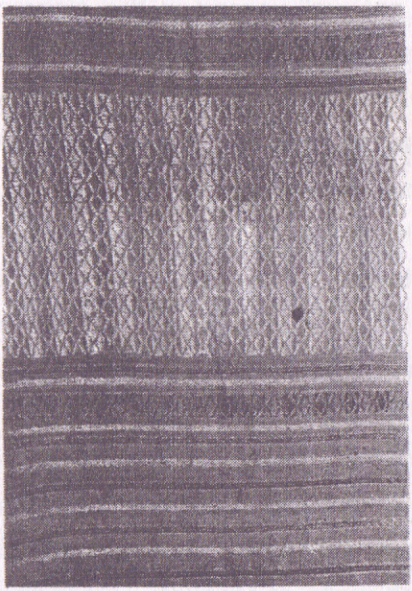
So the trend may be observed . In Unakoti relief six and eight armed Ganesha figures are there . Another specimen called Shiba-Parbati also shows 10th-11th century pattern of crown . Now at least something can be imagined about the pre-mentioned problem —— two different carving styles . Carving style of Chaturmukha linga is superior to that of relief images of Ganesha though in both the cases basic pattern of crowns remains the same . An assumption can be made as the master artists are invited to teach the style of carving and they of course come from Bengal

to teach the local tribal people . Single piece sculptures like Chaturmukha linga or Shiba-Parbati image made by these master artists from Bengal put a guide line in front of local craftsmen . But they can not imitate the style properly . As a result relief works made by them though show 11th-12th century features of Bengal art, are not exact imitation of Bengal art of that time . Same thing happens in Assam during Ahome period . Mention should be made in this connection from 'The sculptures of Assam' [published by Assam State Museum] by Dr. R.D Choudhry, director, Assam State Museum . He writes "The latter, mostly Brahmanical deities done by the Ahom-Koch artists, were perhaps not well-versed in the classic Sanskrit traditions of the Palas. Hence these works of art are found highly impergnated with folk elements . Some attempts were made to imitate the classical style but these were, by and large unsuccessful. To give a few examples of such cases, we might cite the temple near Kuwarital . There is an image of Vishnu . It was carved in imitation of Pala sculptures but it sadly lacked their proportion of limbs, balance of structure and rhythm of lines , even though it has a handsome Kirtimukha at the top ." [p— 9]

Now it is seen that same thing is happening in case of Unakoti relief . Local people failed to follow the style taught by the master carvers . And disproportionate stiff postured colossal figures are carved on the rock walls of Unakoti . Ganesha panel is the best example of such work . Though local artists can't follow the style practiced in Bengal or other places ,

Jatamukuta depicted on Chaturmukalinga, Unakoti

CHAKMA GARMENT DECORATED WITH TRIANGULAR MOTIFS NAMED SAMLEF AND FINE PARALLEL LINES CALLED HERANG



CHAKMA GARMENT

Jatamukuta of a 12th Century Hara-Gauri found in Bengal

CROWN CARVED IN SHIBA PARBATI IMAGE

SURYA, 11TH CENTURY, SOUTH TRIPURA

Crown made on the Head of four armed Ganesha

Crown, Ardhanariswar, 12th Century, Bengal

Crown of Mahish Mardini, 10th Century, Bengal

during their affords a new carving style has been developed in Unakoti and that can be known as typical Unakoti style . Such style can't be found at any other place in India or abroad . Dr. Ratna Das [ex curator, Tripura State Museum, Agartala] writes in her book 'Art and Architecture of Tripura '[published by Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Tripura] about Unakoti style - "Unakoti presents a noteworthy narration of some mythological stories in such a plastic language which is somehow unrelated to mainstream of Indian art of the classical or early medieval period . The plastic volume of the classical era or the soft linear movement of the mediaeval period are absent in the colossi of Unakoti ; instead they are crude , stiff and angular ." [p—50]

All the relief works are products of the same period. If several features are observed and each one is compared to the other, it can easily be understood. All the relief works bear some common features - design, motifs, forms.

COMPOSITIONAL ASPECTS:-

Various stone sculptures found at Unakoti either single piece or relief both the types show features of 10^{th}-12^{th} century art. In single piece sculpture, typical 10^{th}-12^{th} century type of stele designing can be noticed.In these centuries, sculptures of Bengal show a particular type of stele designing which is present in Unakoti sculptures'. The particular type shows the main figure in the centre and other small figures or objects keeping the main figure in the centre take place on the stele in such a manner that one side of the main figure is just the

duplicate of the other . Or it can be said like this one side of the stele is decorated according to the design of other side . This type of stele designing can also be seen in the sculptures of Assam as Assam of that time follows the art style of Bengal . In this context opinion of Dr. R.D Choudhry should be mentioned to make the matter clearer . He writes in his book 'The Sculptures of Assam' [published by Assam State Museum, p- 8] "By the 11th 12th century the high relief stele art of Assam developed it's own charecteristic features . It is then rightly called 'Brahmaputra style'. This triangular top with otherwise rectangular stele was now filled with decorative designs disposed of in symmetrical style , one half duplicating the other half ."

This 11th 12th century pattern of stele designing can be seen in Unakoti sculptures . For instance, if the sculpture called Shiba-Parbati is observed, it can be seen that main figures of Shiba and Parbati [broken] are surrounded by small figures and they are placed in a symmetrical order [though incomplete] . And this kind of symmetrical composition is a major aspect of 11th 12th century Bengal, Assam art . But this particular sculpture is a product of little early period . Because if properly studied , 11th 12th century sculptures show very crowded symmetrical composition on stele , but Shiba-Parbati's stele is not so crowded though there are figures composed in a symmetrical order . So the period in which it is produced , is probably the later part of 10th century or early 11th century . And it can be assumed that in this period such stele designing

is just started and has not been so much crowded as it is in late 11th and 12th . More specimens of this period are also there in Unakoti . Such are the figures of standing deity . The single piece sculptures like Ganesha, Shiba, Hanuman, Uma-Maheswar are carved on stele in high relief and they are surely of 10th century as they do not bear crowded symmetrical composition of 11th 12th century , their steles are free from clumsiness .

After single piece works , compositional aspects of relief works should be discussed . If the central head is taken as a matter of study then it can be noticed that the total composition also bear the pre-discussed features . Main subject of the composition is the colossal head of Shiba and in the both sides there are two female deities riding their 'Bahanas' . Both the sides look similar . Female deity in the left side is very similar to that of the right . Posture, appearance, way of being composed everything is the same . So here it is noticed that the small figures are placed on the both sides of the central head in a symmetrical order , which is major aspect of 11th 12th century art . If the whole rock-wall is imagined as a vast stele and the central Shiba head as the main figure then the matter becomes more easier to be understood . But also in this case the crowd of 12th century stele designing can't be found . So it can be said that the work is of 10th—11th century. Another relief work Ganesha panel shows very crowded composition . Though the basic structure of the composition is simple figures are composed vertically and the matter has

been described horizontally . This one is probably the work of little later period .

After discussing about the designs of crowns , style of carving, composition etc. one thing can be said that all these works [both single piece and relief] are products of a particular period that is from 10th to 12th century A.D . In this context opinions of other scholars need to be mentioned . Gautam Sengupta writes in 'Tripura Sculpture : An Overview' [published in Archaeology of North Eastern India, edited by Jaiprakash Singh and Gautam Sengupta, published by Har-Anand publications and Vikash publishing house] about single piece sculptures of Unakoti "In addition , there are a number of detached stelai depicting deities of the Hindu pantheon , like Mukhalinga, Uma-Mahesvara, Ganesha, Visnu, Vrsabha etc. carved out of sand stone, these stelai most certainly confirm to the East India style of 9th through 12th centuries ." [p—178] Single piece sculptures of Unakoti are products of 10th – 11th century as it has been assumed by researcher earlier and the notion is now supported by Mr. Sengupta's opinion .

Priyabrata Bhattacharya writes in the article 'Art and Archaeology' [published in 'Tripura—The land and it's people', edited by Dr. Jagadish Ganchoudhry, published by Leeladevi publications, Delhi-110035] about colossal relief work of Unakoti - "A unique colossal head-image of Aghora-Rudra is carved on the rock-wall of the Unakoti hills and this gigantic head bears the terrific aspect of Rudra-Siva . This image also belongs to the eleventh and twelfth centuries ." [p- 61]

Jayantanath Choudhry also opines that the period of Unakoti specimens are 10th 11th centuries [Abrita Itihas Unakoti , p-19,34, published by Smt. S. Sarkar, Tharpakna, Ranchi .] .
But Gautam Sengupta opines that the relief of Unakoti are products of later period and he tries to connect them with the entry of Tripuri people in Tripura . ['Early sculptures of Tripura', published in 'Studies in the History of North-East India', edited by Prof. J.B Bhattacharya, NEHU publications, Shillong, p-7] Also Dr. Ratna Das opines in her book 'Art and Architecture of Tripura' [published by Tribal Research Institute, Agt., p-50-51] that relief works belong to 14th 15th centuries . Dr. Chawla also thinks like this .
But researcher can't agree with Gautam Sengupta, Dr. Ratna Das and Dr. Chawla . There is a little hesitation to accept their opinions as fact . If Unakoti relief works are made during 14th 15th centuries then Manikya rulers[14th 15th century] of Tripura should have some knowledge about the matter . But 'Rajmala'[story of the Manikyas] tells nothing clearly about the construction of Unakoti though it is written in 'Rajmala' that several Manikya kings have visited the shrine in different periods . Rather detailed study of Jatamukuta, composition etc. shows that relief works bear features which are commonly seen in 11th, 12th century Bengal art . No evidence of Manikya rule over this land during these centuries is found yet . It is true that stylistically single pieces and relief works are not similar , the former follow Bengal art style while latter is full of local elements .

VISHNU 11TH CENTURY, UDAIPUR, TRIPURA

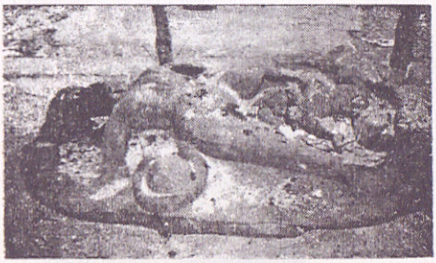
VISHNU, 11TH CENTURY, BAGHAURA, COMILLA, BENGAL

Standing Deity
(Bishnu), Unakoti

Standing Deity,
Unakoti

Uma-Maheswar,
Unakoti

Kali, 10th Century,
Bengal



Birth of Hanuman,
Unakoti

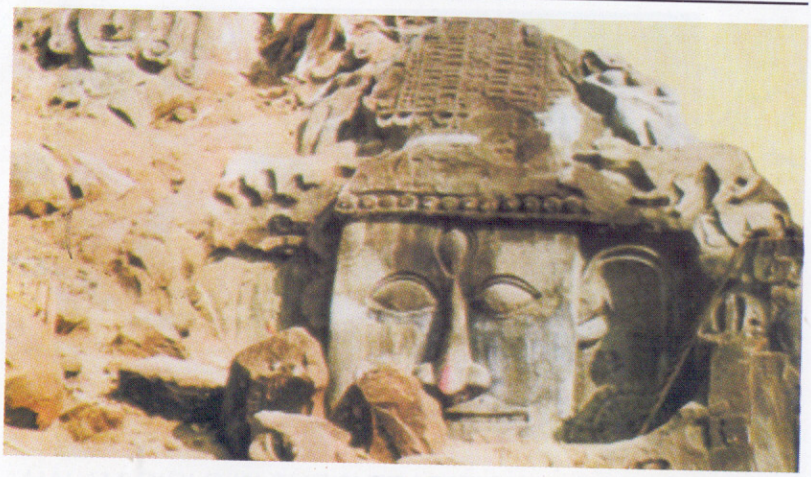
Standing Deity,
Unakoti

Devi, 10th
Century, Bengal

Vishnu, Sridhara,
11th Century,
Murshidabad,
Bengal

Shiba Parbati,
Unakoti

Tara, 11th
Century,
Vikrampur, Bengal

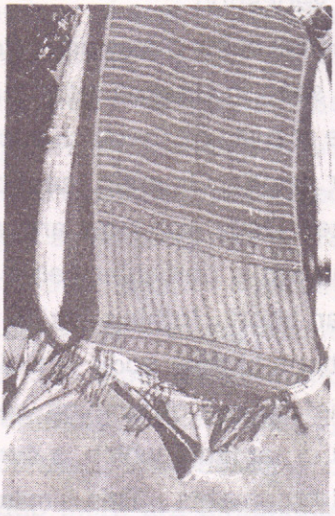


CENTRAL SHIBA WITH TWO FEMALE COMPANIONS

GANESHA PANEL

HALAM GIRLS IN THEIR TRADITIONAL DRESSES

HORIZONTALLY STRIPED
REANG COSTUME



HORIZONTALLY STRIPED
CHAKMA GARMENT

DRESSES AND ORNAMENTS OF UNAKOTI SCULPTURES

Different types of dresses and ornaments are seen in Unakoti sculptures . In single piece sculptures garments are conventional and same kind of dresses can be noticed in the sculptures of the other parts of Tripura such as Udaipur, Dharmanagar and also different parts of Bengal . Single piece sculptures like Shiba with five heads , standing deities wear particular kind of clothings which is also seen in sculptures of Bengal . Single piece sculptures of this type show influence of Bengal art on them as they have been made following Bengal art .

But in case of relief works it is different . In relief sculptures influence of local life can be noticed . The dresses they wear are very short .

Dresses of the males differ from that of the females . Generally it is seen in Unakoti relief that male figures wear a particular type of belt , for instance such belts are seen in Ganesha with four arms , Gigantic male deity, Bishnu image in Ganesha panel, Deity with bow and arrow [Kamdeb] . But in female figures this particular belt is absent . Male and female both wear short clothing which ends above knee while upper portions of their body remain unclothed .

Relief figures of Unakoti wear a particular type of wearings and ornaments which is commonly seen in tribal costumes and ornaments . This similarity shows how relief sculptures have been influenced by local tribal life . Also it becomes es composed horizontally . And these fine stripes are often seen

in the dresses of Reang, Halam people . The seat or chariot on which she stands is also decorated with linear design which creates some triangular forms and also it is seen in chapter-3 that triangle is a motif commonly used in tribal art . Similar design can be found in Kuki ornaments and also in criss- cross weaving pattern of cane crafts . Another image just beside the pre mentioned one also shows similar clothing . In this case female figure is seated on a decorated seat . She wears a short clothing designed with fine parallely drawn stripes composed in horizontal order as it is in the pre-mentioned figure . Both the two female figures wear the dresses which are similar to that of Reang, Halam people . The seat of the second image has also stripes parallely drawn on it . Also there are some circular forms on the legs of seat and circular motifs are also found in tribal costumes .

Another important figure is 'the deity with bow and arrow[generally known as Kamdeb]' . This figure also wears short clothing like Dhoti of tribal males . His cloth is decorated with motifs like rhombus, triangle and some floral motifs are also there . Such motifs are found in tribal costumes specially in the dresses of Chakma, Noatia, Lushai and Darlong people . Triangle, circle etc. are often found in tribal dresses and craft works . All these geometric forms have been used by tribal people of this region to decorate their dresses and ornaments . In this figure of Kamdeb there are ornaments designed with fine lines and bids . Heavy ear-rings bear floral motif in the centre and very similar thing can be noticed in the

ornaments of Rupini people . Keeping the little flower in the centre parallel lines move in a cyclic order . He also bears traditional Halam neck-less called 'Dankari' . But the way of wearing is little different .

New specimen is a female figure riding it's chariot [Bahana] . It is in the right side of central Shiba head . The dress she wears is a short Pachra designed with very fine parallel stripes composed diagonally . Such fine parallel stripes are often seen in Reang dresses . There are some circular motifs and also a floral motif in her Pachra . Ear-rings she bears are decorated with floral motifs and bordered with small bids . Similar pattern is found in Rupini ornament and Lushai ornament . The Balas or rings she shows in her hands are also used by Reang Halam women . Her neck-less is made of bids of different sizes .

The next important specimen is the central head . It's long conical head-gear draws attention of the viewers . Such long conical head-gears are seen on the heads of Halam dancers at the time of festival . The whole head-gear is divided by some vertical parallel stripes . Between two stripes the place has been decorated with motifs like rhombus, butterfly, flowers etc. Series of rhombus is composed between two stripes in a vertical order . As it has been mentioned earlier that such series of rhombus is often found in tribal textiles and ornaments . There is a similarity between vertical composition of this head-gear and that of Lushai, Darlong costumes . Outside the state Mizos also wear costumes designed in a vertical order . So designing of Lushai, Darlong, Mizo people can be observed

in the head-gear . The central head has ear-rings designed in the style of Rupini, Halam ornaments . In the left side of central head there is another head called Ugra Shiba . This head is just like the pre-mentioned head . It shows partly broken head-gear which has a band at the bottom placed just above the forehead . This band is designed with a series of triangles and it has been a common design of tribal dresses and ornaments . Chakmas have such design on their 'Hadi' and they call these triangle motifs - 'Samlej' . Ear-rings of this head are like those of central head . In the left side of this head there is another head of Shiba with his hairs untied . In the head-gear there are same 'Samlej' like motifs and it is underlined with bids of different sizes . Ear-rings are little different in style . It has some triangular motifs composed in cyclic order and there is a big circular form surrounded by small bids in the centre . But the motifs remain the same - the triangle, the bid . Such motifs of ear-ring can be noticed in another relief called Soumya Shiba . In this case designs are basically circles and triangles . It has similar head-gear as the head-gears discussed earlier . Under the cheek near throat there are some fine linear designs perhaps neck-less . Other relief figure like 'hybrid form' shows a particular neck-less which is like that of Shiba with untied hairs - triangle and circle are basic forms used in both the cases .

Another important panel is the panel of relief figures of three Ganeshas and one Bishnu image . Colossal images of Ganeshas also bear dresses and ornaments . First one [from

the right] with four arms wear short Dhoti like dress in lower portion of body . It has a belt designed with rhombus motifs which are common motifs of tribal garment . Also there are floral motifs drawn within circular forms . Such floral motifs are commonly seen in tribal ornaments . This Ganesha image also bears a neck-less made of circular forms and this type of neck-less is always used by Reang, Halam, Chakma people . Halams call it 'Dankari' while Chakmas call it 'Tenga Sora' . Ganeshas with six arms , eight arms and four arms , bear a particular type of ornament in the ears particularly in uppermost portions of ears . Such use of ornament in this part of ear is purely according to tribal taste . Reang females bear such ornaments in the upper portions of ears and they call it 'Owarik' . [courtesy :- 'Tripurar Adibasi Jeeban O Sanskriti' by Suren Debbarma, Parul Prakasani, p—49]

Similar ear-rings can be noticed in the ears of Ganesha with eight hands [10th—11th century] found at Rajshahi, Bangladesh [now is in Ashutosh Museum, Kolkata] . Also Ganesha with eight arms [12th century] collected from North Bengal [now in Indian Museum, Kolkata] bears such ornaments . Single piece Ganesha of Unakoti also bears such ornament . It has been noticed that generally 10th-12th century Ganesha specimens found at different places of Bengal have such ear-ornaments. Another colossal relief sculpture is of a gigantic male deity . It also shows ear-rings like that of the central head . And such pattern is seen in Rupini ornaments . It's dress is just like the Dhoti of Ganesha with four arms . It has a partly broken garland

DANCING FEMALE DEITY WEARING HORIZONTALLY DESIGNED 'PACHRA', UNAKOTI

SEATED FEMALE DEITY SHOWING HORIZONTALLY DESIGNED 'PACHRA', UNAKOTI

of sculls . In the left of the pre-mentioned image there is a female figure seated in 'Bajrasana' . Her ear-rings are same as the mentioned one . Her necklesses are made of small bids and such necklesses are often seen in the necks of Reang females . The 'Balaya's in her left hand are generally considered as tribal ornaments . Her dress is decorated with floral motifs .

Other detached works are there at Unakoti scattered here and there and they also bear design . 'Bull' image in front of the central head shows a particular design on it's back . Similar design can be seen in the seat of dancing female deity as it is discussed earlier . Designs on bull's back are nothing but some parallely drawn lines which create triangular forms . It is needless to say that parallel lines and triangles are features of tribal design .

Halam ladies in Traditional lower garments

BUDDHIST DEITY SHOWING VAKRA, ON HEAD

Horizontally designed lower garment

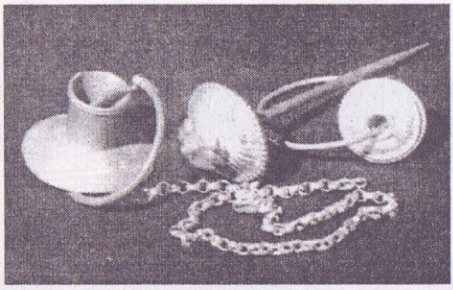
Deity with bow and arrow showing 'Dankari Mala', Unakoti

Tribal woman with 'Dankari Mala'

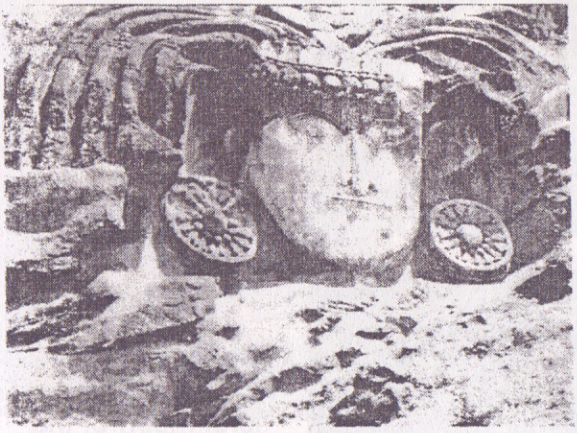
Deity with bow and arrow showing 'Dankar Mala', Unakoti

Dhoti (Decorated with geometric and floral motif) of the deity with bow and arrow, Unakoti

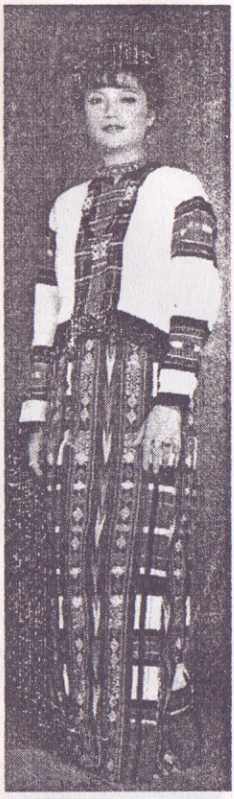
Female deity, Unakoti



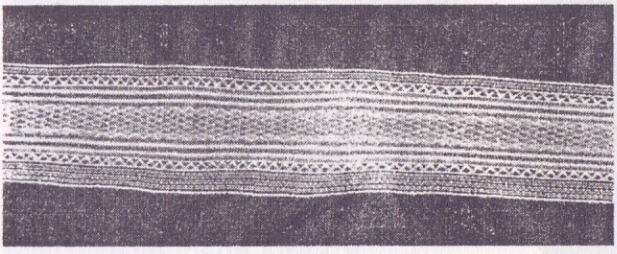
Rupini Ornaments



Designed with 'Samlej' like motifs, Shiba, Unakoti



Vertically designed costume of Mizo lady



Tringular Motifs called Samlej, Chakma dress

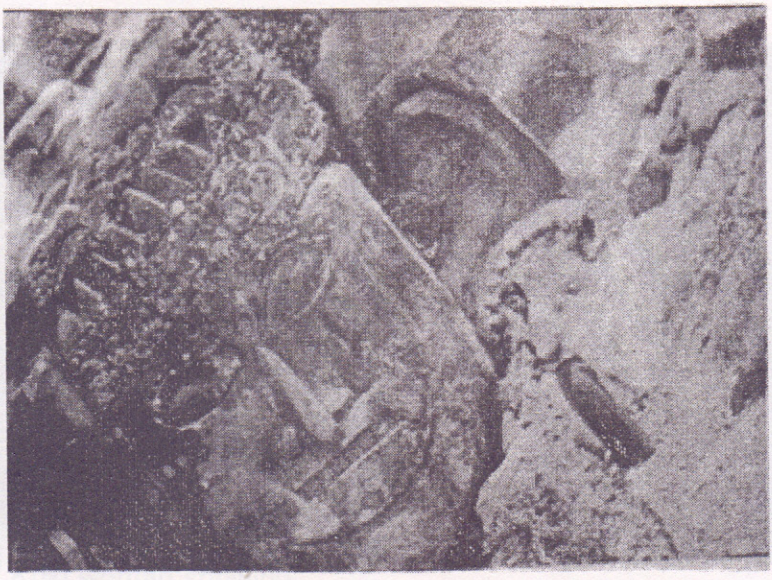
EAR-RING OF CENTRAL SHIBA

VERTICALLY DESIGNED CROWN OF CENTRAL SHIBA, UNAKOTI

SOUMYA SHIBA UNAKOTI

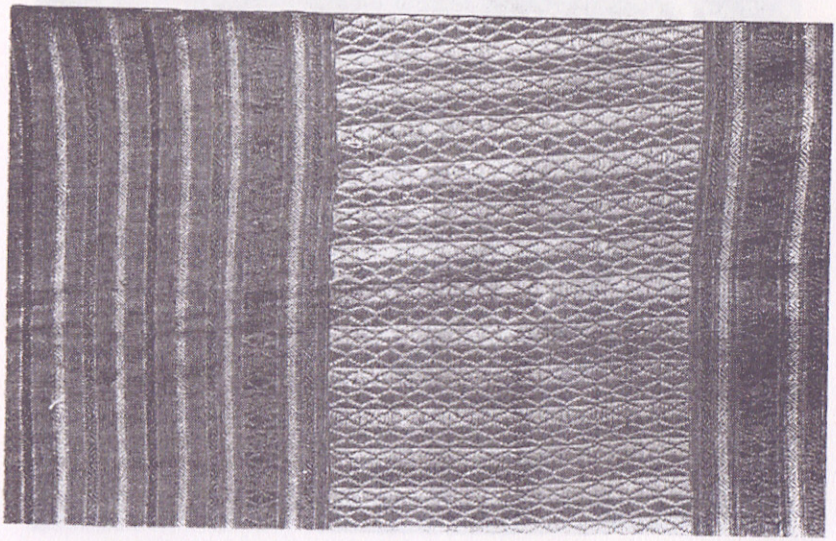
ANIMAL WITH HUMAN HEAD

Samraj like Motifs on head band, Shiba, Unakoti



HEAD CALLED RUDRA SHIVA

Belt decorated with rhombus motifs,
four armed Ganesha, Unakoti



Chakma dress decorated with rhombus motifs

Four armed Ganesha with 'Dankari Mala' and ornaments on upper portion of ear

Kuki woman showing ornaments on upper portions of ear

Reang lady showing 'Dankari Mala'

After discussing about design of dresses and ornaments of Unakoti relief sculptures , one thing is easy to be understood that designs of these dresses and ornaments are nothing but organization of geometric forms and parallel lines . And it also has been the major characteristic of tribal design . The matter shows how relief works of Unakoti have been influenced by local tribal art of designing .

SIGNIFICANCE OF VARIOUS FORMS FOUND AT UNAKOTI :

The stone image of tortoise found at Unakoti and the tradition of Dharma puja. The stone image of tortoise found at Unakoti is very much significant . Some people try to find a connection between the image and tortoise form of Bishnu as described in 'Avatar's of Bishnu . But tortoise form of Bishnu or'Kurmavatar' is generally a hybrid form . It is a mixture of tortoise and human figure . But the pure tortoise image found at Unakoti may has some other significance . In this connection some informations should be mentioned from 'Bangalir Itihas'[p-486] by Dr. Niharranjan Roy. Niharranjan writes in his book that 'Dharma thakur' is a deity of pre-aryan early inhabitants . Later the concept of Dharma has been mixed-up with Vedic, Pouranic and other religious thoughts . Now-a-days Dharma thakur has been identified as Bishnu or Shiba . The symbol worshipped as Dharma thakur is a stone image of tortoise . Another scholar Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sarkar writes in his book 'Sanskritik Itihaser Prasanga' [p-29] that some years earlier , two shells of tortoise have been found at Vajrayogini village of Vikrampur[present Dhaka in Bangladesh]

. On them there are two inscriptions which are of 10th, 11th centuries . The first one is -"Let Jin[Buddha] be the cause of welfare and liberation of people". And the second is -"Namo Bhagabate Basudebaya - Namo Buddhaya, Dharma made by Manurangsharma ." It is clear from the inscriptions that some Manurangsharma makes these writings on the shells to show his regard to both the deities - Bishnu and Buddha . The shells of tortoise are now in Dhaka Museum[Bangladesh] . In this connection Dinesh Chandra also mentions the opinion of Sukumar Sen - "The emblem of Dharma - rather his Padapitha or footstool on which was placed or engraved the Paduka(boots or sandals) of Dharma – is a tortoise . In most cases , it is a natural bit of stone shaped like a tortoise, in other cases it is a chiselled stone image of the same . In very rare cases , the image is made of brass ."[B.C.Law Volume, Part-1]

Dinesh Chandra also mentions the writings of Kshitish Prasad Chattopadhyay - "The image of this(i.e. the Dharma deity known as Yatrasiddhiray worshipped in the village of Maynapur in Bankura District)

and several other Dharma images are said to be of stone and shaped like a tortoise, about 4in to 6in long ."['Dharma worship' published in Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol-viii, 1942,pp-99-135]

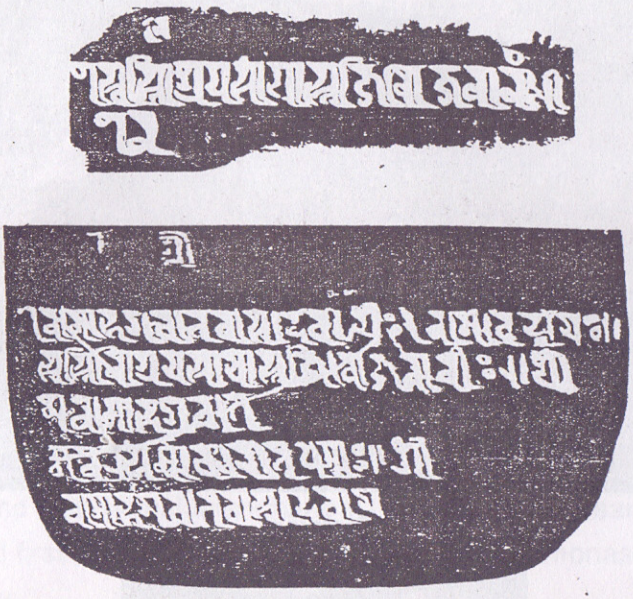
After showing various references Dinesh Chandra Sarkar writes that worship of Dharma thakur has been popular in Bengal during 10th, 11th centuries . [ref— 'Sanskritik Itihaser

Prasanga' by Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sarkar , published by Sahityalok]

Unakoti complex as it has been assumed earlier that the whole complex is constructed during 10th, 11th centuries , also shows stone made tortoise image and it is quite possible that influence of 'Dharma puja' is the reason of making such image .

After discussing about tortoise image found at Unakoti and it's connection with Dharma thakur worship, the reverse opinion should be mentioned . Scholar like Prof. Ashutosh Bhattacharya does not accept the concept of tortoise image of Dharma thakur . He writes in his book 'Bangla Mangal Kabyer Itihas' [p-622] that actually there is no connection between tortoise image and Dharma thakur . But at the same time he says that where concept of Dharma thakur is influenced by Hindu religion , there Dharma thakur has been identified as Bishnu and in this connection tortoise image has been connected with Dharma thakur .

Unakoti as a Hindu pilgrimage shows tortoise image which may be identified as symbol of Dharma thakur . Generally tortoise images of Dharma thakur are of two types . One type of image shows foot print drawn on it's shell and the other type does not [according to 'Banglar Loukik Debdebi' by Gopendra-krishna Bose, p-189]. Needless to say Unakoti specimen belongs to the second group . The shells of tortoise found at Vajrayogini village as mentioned earlier , show that the Dharma deity has a close connection with tortoise and also it is connected with both Bishnu and Buddha . It shows



Inscription on the shell of tortoise found at Vikrampur, Bengal, (Courtesy - Prof. D. C. Sarkar)

Tortoise, Unakoti

Tortoise

Tortoise

that Dharma thakur is a deity of Buddhist Baishnabas or Baishnabite Buddhists . And the period –10th 11th centuries are the time in Bengal for the Buddhists to become Hindus . So Dharma thakur is a deity of Hinduised Buddhists . Nath saints or the Domb priests are supposed to be the priests of Dharma puja . And it should be remembered that Nath saints are the people who come from Vajrayani Buddhism and Buddhist Siddhacharyas are their forefathers . Nath saints according to Dr. N.C Nath are creators of the Dharma-deity [ref:— 'Nath Sampradayer Itihas' p-385-386, by Dr. N.C Nath, published by Tripura Rajya Nath Kalyan Samiti .] Also there is a legend that Haripa[Jalandharipa] the popular nath saint has started first the worship of Dharma deity in the monastery of Balluka .

Fish form found at Unakoti and it's significance :

Stone image of a fish found at Unakoti is equally important . The ear-rings of fish are also noticeable . Fish has it's own significance in art and religion , as Dr. Mahadeb Chakraborty writes in his book 'The Concept of Rudra Shiva Through the Ages' [p-116] - "The fish as a phallic symbol was common to many races of antiquity . Freud finds in fish a symbol of the male organ ; but it specially it's head and mouth has also been recognized as a female symbol .81"[81- Encyclopedia of World Art. Vol-xii, 1st ed, p-895, Cunter H, op. cit. pp-185-86]

But in case of Unakoti it can be described in a different way . In the same book Dr. Chakraborty writes -"The close

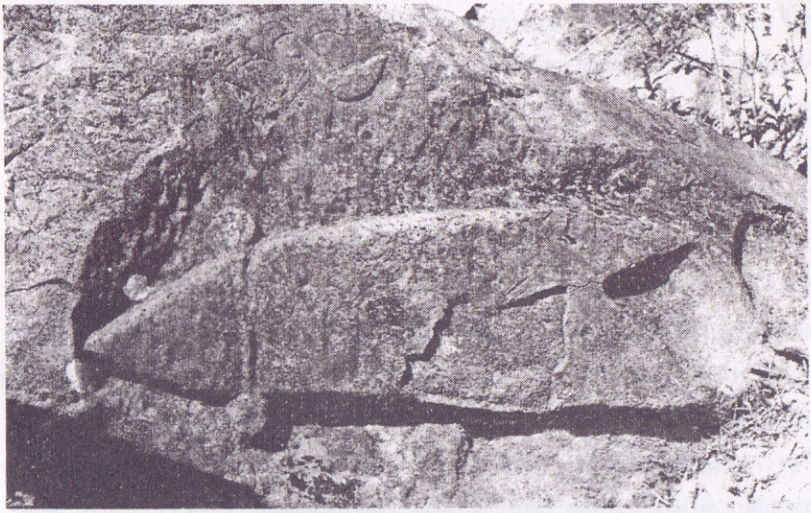
association of the fish with Siva is to be found in the Kalika Purana where Kama , after being restored to life installed the image of the fish form of Siva on the ManiKuta mountain in Assam ." [p-117]

Another renowned writer Dr. Shashi Bhusan Dasgupta writes in his book 'Obscure Religious Cult'[p-383] - "Traditionally, however , Mina-nath has variously been associated with fish , and that perhaps because of his name (as Gorakh-nath is with the cow, Kukkuri-pada with the dog, and so on) . We have seen that Mina-nath received instructions on Yoga from Adi-nath in the form of a fish 5. In another legend Matsyendra is said to have come out as a boy from the mouth of a fish 6. In the pictorial representations of the Siddhacaryas , available in Tibet and Nepal , Mina-nath is always associated with the fish 3." [5- The Sheat-fish according to the Bengali tradition . cf. matsya rup dhari tatha mina mocandar / tangir lamate rahe bogal sundar // Goraksa –Vijaya p-13.

6- Vide Yogi-Sampradayaviskrti, ch—ii

3- sec B. S . pp, B.S. 1329 no-2, also Kalyana , Yoganka]

From above reference , it can be understood that Matsyendra nath or Mina nath , the renowned nath yogi is always connected with fish as Adinath or Shiba is also connected with fish . As it has been discussed earlier that Unakoti has been constructed by Chandra rulers [there is full possibility of happening so] and Gobinda Chandra who is a nath panthi saivaite may take a major role in it . Naturally influence of Nath religion exists in Unakoti . The Kundala or ear-rings of



Fish

Fish

the fish found at Unakoti are also connected with the same of Nath yogis who also bear big ear-rings [Kanphata Yogi] . So the fish form of Unakoti may be visual representation of Adi nath [Shiba] or Matsyendra nath in fish form .

After discussing about the significances of the forms like fish, tortoise found at Unakoti , one thing should be mentioned that even in recent days some clans of Reang community as well as the Uchoi in Tripura,

have their regards for these beings -i.e. tortoise, fish as these have been considered as totems of those particular clans . For instance some clans of Reang community as they are named after those beings are mentioned . Such clans are - the Apeto clans(fish), Tooima-ia-phauh(tortoise), ['Tribal Pujas and Festivals in Tripura' by Priyabrata Bhattacharya , Cultural Research Institute and Museums , Govt. of Tripura, Agt. P-14] . Probably these beings worshipped at Unakoti later take place in tribal society being considered as totem .

The Hunter panel and Charyapada literature :

Unakoti sculptures have a close connection with Siddhacharyas and Charyapada literature . In Charyapada literature, there is a description of Sabara people like this - Sabaras live in hills and forests , they wear fans of peacock, bear neckless made of gunja seeds and in ears there are Vajrakundala . The verse goes like this -"Uncha uncha pabat tahi basai sabari bali / Morangi prichha parhin sabari gibat gunjari mali / Ekeli sabari e ban hindai karnakundal vajradhari / Ti o dhan khat parila saboro mahasukhe seji chhaila / Saboro bhujang nairamani dari pembarati pahaili"

[ref—'Bangalir Itihas' p-230] . They lie on bed in their hut with peace ; hunting by bow and arrow - is their major occupation . [ref—'Bangalir Itihas' p—470]

Now similar scene can be seen in Hunter panel of Unakoti - hunter is with bow and arrow . He is followed by his female . He wears perhaps fans of peacock on head . Behind them there is a pair of peacocks which may stand as a symbol of their [sabar-sabari] mutual relation . Siddhacharyas are supposed to be in the period between 9th and 12th century ['Bangalir Itihas'p- 530] and their Charyapadas bear descriptions of social life of that period . Unakoti- period of the constructions is assumed as 10th-11th century . So there may fall an influence of the hunter race [Kiratas], who reside at Unakoti area , on Charyapada literature . Also a container is drawn at the end of the panel - perhaps a wine container . According to Charyapada descriptions sabara drinks wine [Bangalir Itihas p—470] . So in this connection the wine container is very significant . Also it can be known from the verses that they are somehow influenced by Vajrayani Buddhism as they bear vajrakundals in ears .

Motifs related to Tantricism :

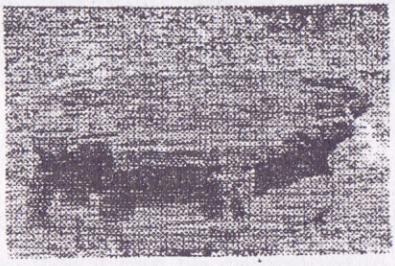
Various motifs can be seen at Unakoti which are not only designal patterns but something more than this . For instance the motif drawn on bull's back can be observed . It is a geometric pattern showing ten angles . In Tantric texts , this particular diagram has a significance and generally such patterns are called 'Sarvarthasadhaka Chakra' or 'Sarvaraksakara Chakra' .

Hunter Panel

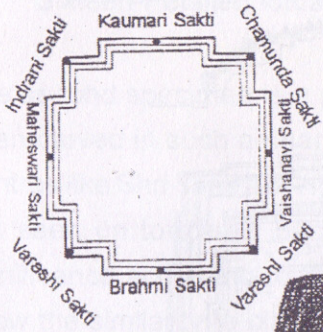
Container

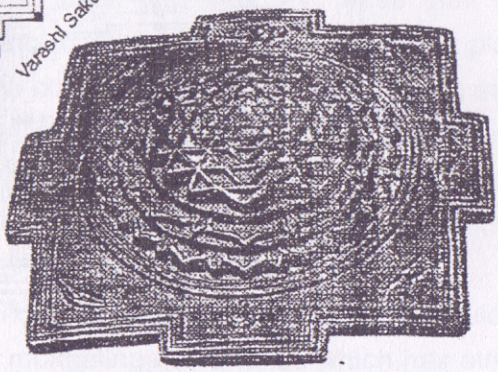
Bull

Bull

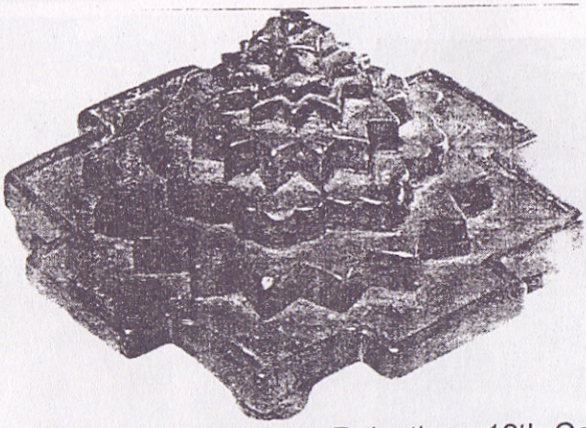


Pendestal, Unakoti

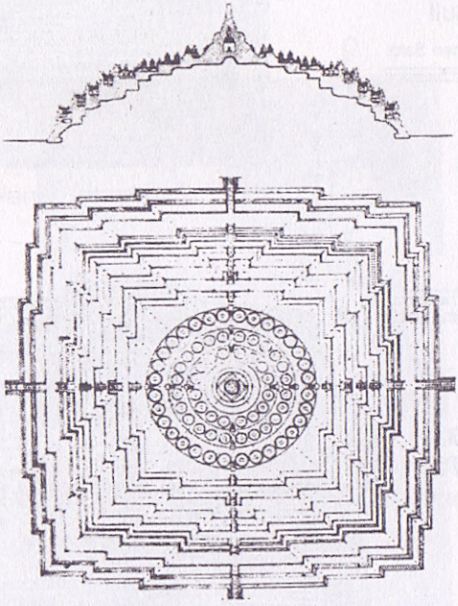




Sri Yantra, Copper, 17th Century, South India



The Meru form of Sri Yantra, Rajasthan, 18th Century, Bronze



Ground plan and elevation of the Barabadur stupa based on the conception of Sri Yantra

Sixteen-Petalled lotus drawn on tortoise, Unakoti

The second specimen is a partly broken pedestal which has been carved in such a shape that it can be compared to the Yantras like Shri Yantra of Hindu Tantric text . Also four lotuses are seen on tortoise's back and they also have their own significance according to Tantric text . In the context plates show the similarity to clarify the matter There are also some motifs which are to be explained . Such a form is 'Vajra' carved on Ganesha with six arms . The form is very much related to Buddhist tantricism . The form is placed on a lotus with three petals . Later it will be discussed in brief .

Apart from these peculiarly shaped Mukhalingas should be studied . There is a mukhalinga at Unakoti which has almost rounded flat top . On this flat surface there are five linga type

forms . These rounded forms are composed in a particular manner . One big linga is in the centre and other four smaller in size , are placed in such a manner that the big one is surrounded by them . This particular thing is somehow related to the ritual 'Panchopasana' which is an age-old ritual and still survives in rural Bengal . In the context opinion of Dr. Suresh Chandra Bandopadhyay should be mentioned . His writing on the topic is published in 'Bangladesher Itihas' by Dr. R.C Majumdar [published by General printers and publishers PVT.LTD. Kolkata, p-254-255] . He opines that in mediaeval Bengal , Hindu people have been divided in five religious groups according to the Gods worshipped by them . The groups are - Baishnaba [worshipper of Bishnu], Saiba[worshipper of Shiba],Sakta[worshipper of Sakti], Saura[worshipper of Surya], Ganapatya[worshipper of Ganapati] . All of Bengali Hindus worship these five deities according to 'Smriti Shastra' . All these five deities are worshipped together like this - each sect place their main God in the centre [either the symbol or the image] and other four Gods are placed in the four corners surrounding the central deity . This tradition still survives in the form of 'Narayan sila' or 'Shiba linga' made of soil . So the rounded linga shaped five forms of Unakoti are also composed in such order . Main deity is placed in the centre and while other four are in the four corners of it . The whole form is surely made for 'Panchopasana' . All these five rounded forms are symbols of five deities - Shiba, Sakti, Bishnu, Surya, Ganapati.

Another figure called 'Ekamukha linga' shows similar flat top and there are five rounded forms just like pre-mentioned one . Also in this case one big round is in the centre and it has been surrounded by four small rounded forms . This pattern is also related to 'Panchopasana' . But in this case five deities are surrounded by smaller bids . These smaller bids are perhaps 'Abaran Debtas' or the deities who cover the main one [ref- 'Soviete Banga sanskriti', p-96, by Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya , prof. in Calcutta University, published by Pratima pustak, 13 college row, Kolkata-9] . The matter shows how Unakoti has been influenced by rural rites of Bengal .

Another mukhalinga of Unakoti shows one big linga shaped formation in the centre surrounded by eleven smaller formations . Smaller formations are either 'Abaran debtas' as mentioned earlier or they may be connected with Nath religion . According to the legend about creation of nath people , lord Rudra creats his eleven sons . From these eleven Rudras gradually numerous sons are born . 'Kala' one of these sons , produces 'Bindunath' and this Bindunath has been considered as the forefather of Nath saints . So here the big rounded form in the centre may be imagined as lord Rudra and eleven smaller formations are eleven Rudras created by lord then . And under these there are numerous heads [these show no symbol of Shiba -third eye, jatamukuta] which may be related to the numerous sons of the eleven , who are considered as the forefathers of nath saints . [ref:- 'Bangiya Upadhikosh' p-111, by Ganesh Gupta, published by Nabapatra Prakasan, Kolkata-73]

There are two similar formations in the left side of central head . These two have similar flat tops on which eight or nine small bids surrounding one big round in the centre are seen . It is very difficult to reach the top but the formations are something like pre-mentioned one .

Mukhalinga showing numerous faces as mentioned earlier needs special discussion . There is a mukhalinga at Unakoti which has only one face on it and it is called Ekamukhalinga . Other one shows two faces that is Dbimukhalinga . But the mukhalinga that shows numerous faces is something different . Because there is a particular instruction to be followed while making a mukhalinga . T.A. Gopinath Rao writes in his book 'Elements of Hindu Iconography' vol-2 [published by Motilal Banarasidass Publishers P.V.T L.T.D Delhi] - "The Mukhalinga is one of the varieties of Manusha-lingas and is distinguished from all other lingas in that it bears one or more human faces sculptured on it . - The substance of these is that a Mukhalinga should be made on the Pujabhaga of the Sarvasama-linga and that it might have one, two, three, four or five faces corresponding to the five aspects , Vamadeva, Tatpurusha, Aghora, Sadyojata and Isana, of Siva . If the central shrine has only one door-way in its front or the east side , there should be carved only one face and that on the front side of the linga facing the door-way ; if it has two door-ways one in the front and the other at the back of the central shrine , that is, on the eastern and western sides, there should be two faces carved on the front and back of the linga ; there should

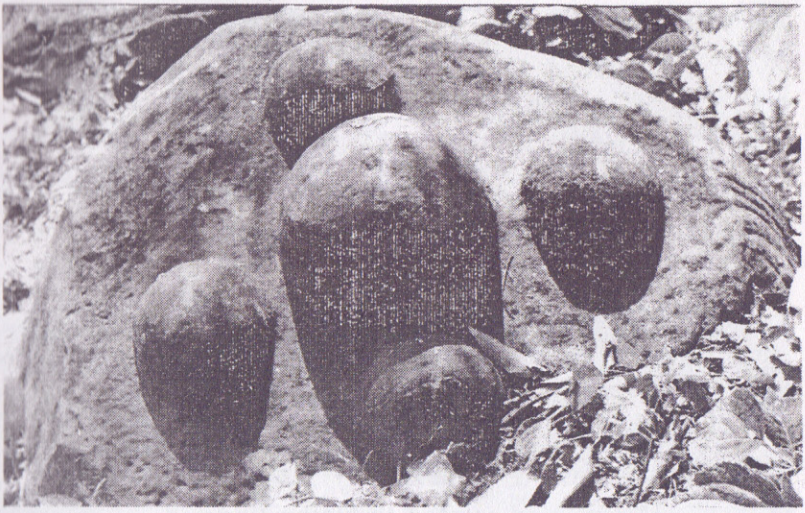
be three faces on the linga, if there are three door-ways, that is , on all sides except the west ; if, lastly , there are four door-ways , there should be four faces or five ; in the former case , the faces are turned in the four directions of the quarters ; in the latter case , in addition to the four faces , there is to be one on the top of the linga and facing the east ." [p-97-98]

Two chaturmukhalingas of Unakoti properly follow the above mentioned rule . Ekamukha and Dbimukha both are perfect . But the rounded one showing numerous faces is something very uncommon as no such specimen of mukhalinga is still found that shows numerous faces . So here arises a confusion about the specimen - whether it is a mukhalinga or not . Rather it may be related to the legend connected with the creation of nath saints as it has been mentioned earlier . Then it is a linga on which the legend of nath saints is depicted .

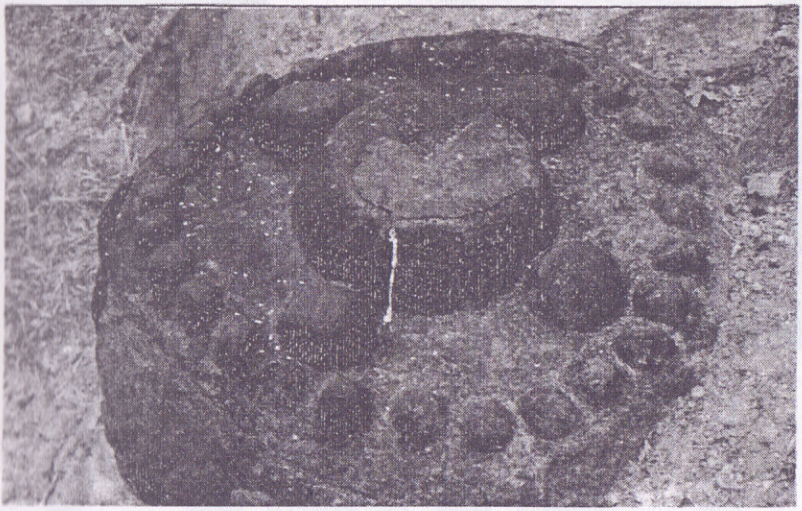
Also some shibalingas are collected from Unakoti . Now they are in the site museum of Unakoti . Some specimens among them show two or three lingas on the same pedestal . In this connection opinion of Shri Rabindra Kumar Siddhantashastree should be mentioned . He writes in 'Saivism through the ages' [published by Munshiram Manoharlal publishers] - "While worshipping Lord Siva in his symbol of a Linga type , a single Linga is generally taken . For early fulfillment of one's desire , one may worship the Lord in a multitude of his Lingas ; but in no case the Lingas should be worshipped in pairs . If anybody disregards this rule and worships the Lord in a pair of his Lingas, he is sure to suffer from poverty 8 ." [8-Prantoshini Tantra] [p-333]

So it is clear that Unakoti specimens which show pair of lingas surely do not follow such instructions of the Tantric texts of later periods[17th,18th century] .

Unakoti specimens are very much unconventional . And there is an influence of diverse instructions and religious thoughts . Two lingas placed on the rock above the left hand of the central head are very important as they have vertically carved portions on them . In the context opinion of T.A Gopinath Rao should be mentioned . He writes in the book 'Elements of Hindu Iconography' [p-94] - "There is yet one more detail in the making of a linga, without which the linga does not become complete and fit for worship ; it is the tracing of certain lines known as the brahma-sutras on the linga . Two vertical lines are engraved on the surface of the 'Rudrabhaga' (or the pujabhaga , as it is often referred to in the Agamas) . The length of these lines should be according to Siddhantasaravali". But Unakoti specimens do not follow the instruction properly . Still there may fall influence of such tradition of drawing lines on linga . These Unakoti lingas may be compared to the vertical divisions of Astattarasata linga or to Dhara linga . Dhara linga as Gopinath Rao describes -"The Dhara-lingas are lingas, the pujabhaga of which has round it vertical fluted facets ranging from five to sixtyfour in number . The Suprabhedagama prescribes 5,7,9,12,16,20,24 and 28 facets for Dhara lingas, while Karanagama mentions only 16 facets ."[p-96,Elements of Hindu Iconography]



Panchopasana ?



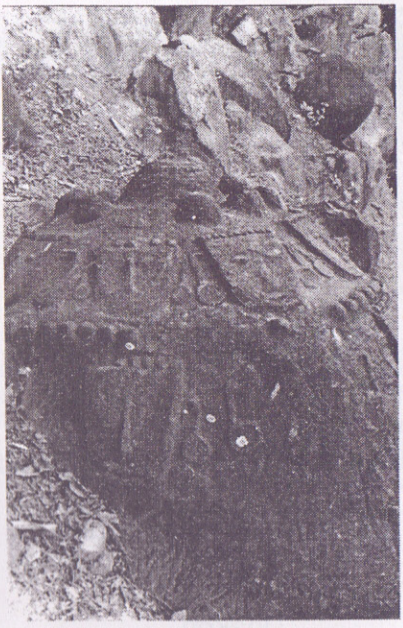
Panchopasana ?

Mukhalinga related to Natha Legend

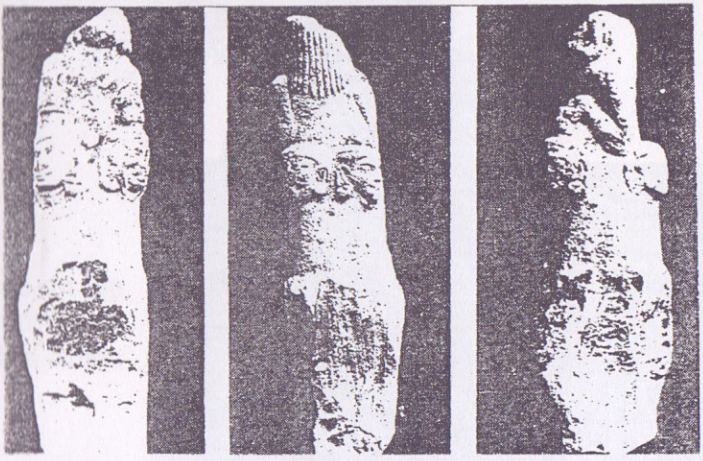
Ekamukhalinga, Unakoti

Ekamukhalinga, 6th Century, Vita, U.P.

Ekamukhalinga, Jageshwar, Almora



Mukhalinga, Unakoti



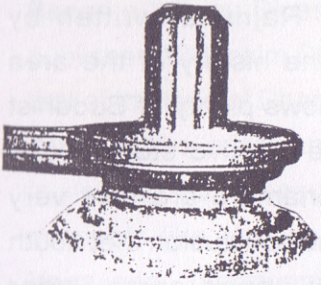
Mukhalingas, Vita, U.P.

Chaturmukhalinga, Unakoti

Chaturmukhalinga, Asirgarh

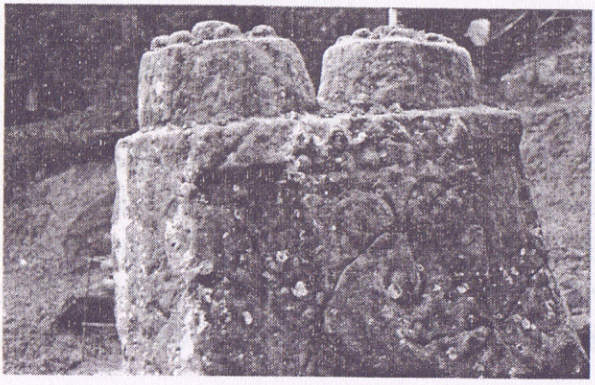
Chatrumukhalinga, Unakoti

Lingas on the column beside Central Shiba



Dhara-Linga (Courtesy : T.A. Gopinath Rao)

Lingas on the column beside Central Shiba



Hindu or Buddhist Influences at Unakoti :

Before searching for any Buddhist influence in Unakoti it is equally important to know about the other areas by which Unakoti is surrounded . According to the report published in 'Dainik Sambad' of 13th March , 2002 reporter Subrata Saha writes about the recent excavation in Boxanagar, Sonamura[west Tripura] . According to the report an architectural ruins of a Buddhist memorial has been found by the archaeologists of A.S.I ., which is of 9th-10th century A.D . The whole architecture goes under the ground because of natural calamity as archaeologists opine . After 12th century Buddhist people leave the area . 'Rajmala' written by Sukreswar and Baneswar can't tell the history of the area before 13th century properly . Pilak shows plenty of Buddhist images . Buddhist stupa architecture , votive stupa found during excavation at Boxanagar, Sonamura are also very important which help one to come to the conclusion that south and west Tripura during mediaeval period come under Buddhism . Also a Buddhist Mahakal image is found at Sonamura earlier . At the end of 'Pala' reign Buddhist Tantricism reaches the climax . When 'Sena' rulers come and take charge of Bengal , they start caste system in Bengal and attack the non Hindu people . During the period Buddhist people leave the land and move towards Nepal , Tibet and other places to save themselves . Tripura- both geographically and politically is related to Bengal . So, this land as a neighboring state of Bengal becomes equally disturbed .

Buddhists in the region also leave the land . All these happen during 11th 12th centuries.

Bronze image of 'Hevajra' found at Dharmanagar of north Tripura also shows the influence of Tantric Buddhism on this part of the state . Unakoti - ruins of ancient civilization may be related to Tantric Buddhism as the images found here are very much uncommon from iconographical point of view . Dinesh Chandra Sen while writing about history of Bengal shows what Jaminikanta Sen writes about the development of Tantric Buddhism in Bengal [Jaminikanta Sen , 'Desh' , Sharadia sankhya, 1341 San, p—86, published in Brihat Banga p-3/0, by Dinesh Chandra Sen , published by Dey's publisher, 13Bankim Chatterjee street, Kolkata-73] . He writes that at the time of Dharma pala [775—810A.D] the concept of 'Maha-sukha' arises and according to the philosophy 'Buddha' is nothing but pleasure . From this concept come other concepts like Vajrayana . Ashis Baidya finds the trace of Vajrayana, Tantrayana, Kalchakrayana Buddhism in Pilak [Pilak Sabhyata, p-48, published by Swagatam Prakasani, Agartala] . The bronze images collected from Pilak are mostly of Buddhist deities like Hariti, Kuber, Tara, Buddha which are of 8th, 9th, 10th centuries as museum authority opines . In the connection opinion of Priyabrata Bhattacharya should be mentioned . He writes in 'Art and Archaeology'[published in 'Tripura—the land and it's people, edited by Jagdish Ganchoudhry, published by Leeladevi Publications , Delhi—110035] - "It is from the eighth century onwards that Tantric

Buddhism flourished and it became the most widely prevalent and popular religion of Tripura from the eighth to the twelfth centuries . Tantricism gradually found expression in iconography and the gods and goddesses of Tantric Buddhism became the common deities in the Tripura of the eighth century . The art and iconography of the same period prove that this time the Mahayana sect began to be eclipsed by Vajrayana Buddhism .[p-65]" He also writes -"A fine image of Hevajra , Saktibirahita ; found at Dharmanagar in north-east Tripura is of great iconographic interest . The image has a thin coating of gold . The god is shown standing in Ardha-parvanka-Nrtyasana pose . On left , the palms of the five hands are missing . He has eight heads and sixteen hands , which carry skull caps containing various animals and a deity . Miniature dancing figures of eight goddesses are placed in eight directions round the god . This image belongs to eleventh century A.D. [p-67]"

Here it should be noticed that Dharmanagar - where the image is found , is situated just beside the area of Unakoti . Apart from this in Kachar, a Buddhist image has been found that is of Avalokiteswar [Karimganj] . So it is impossible for Unakoti to ignore Buddhist influence when entire Tripura and other adjoining areas are completely under Buddhist Tantricism . Assam also comes under the influence of Tantric Buddhism . In this regard H.K Barpujari writes in his book 'The Comprehensive History of Assam' [p-336, published by Publication Board Assam, Guwahati—781021] - "Later

Buddhism - The later form of Buddhism , called Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism , is described by Winternitz as a queer mixture of monastic philosophy, magic and erotics , with a small admixture of Buddhist ideas . B.Bhattacharyya observes : The Vajrayana took into account all the good things , tenets, philosophical notions and theories , and incorporated all that was best in Buddhism and probably in Hinduism also and it was owing to this that it attained great popularity . It satisfied everybody , the cultured and the uncultured , the pious and the sinful, the lower and the higher ranks of people and devotee . 138

This form of Buddhism came into existence in the seventh century A.D. Meanwhile in the Brahmanical sphere Sakta-tantricism developed in such a manner that there ceased to be any sharp distinction between Brahmanical and Buddhist deities and practices . While we cannot be sure of the prevalence of the early form of Buddhism in ancient Assam till the seventh century A.D, there exists convincing evidences of the prevalence of the later form of Buddhism since that time ."

So it can be seen that Vajrayana has been practiced in Tripura during the period between eighth and twelfth century . Also it has been popular during the period in Assam . Now if geographical situation of Unakoti hillock is observed then it can be seen that the place is not very far from Assam and also it is adjacent to Sylhet of Bengal . Shrihatta or present Sylhet is just beside Unakoti . Shrihatta[Sylhet] is said to be

Hevajra, Dharmanagar,
North Tripura

Avolokiteswar, Karimganj,
Assam

one of the four centres of Vajrayana as it is written in 'Sadhanamala' [ref:-The Comprehensive History of Assam , p-339] . So all the places by which Unakoti is surrounded , come under Tantric Buddhism during the period . So it seems to be almost impossible for Unakoti to become aloof while Tantric Buddhism [Vajrayana etc.] is being practiced in the adjacent areas .

Unakoti specimens :

After discussing about other adjoining areas the main spot of Unakoti region should be studied . Though generally Unakoti is known as a Hindu pilgrimage , surroundings of the area show various Buddhist archieological indications. 'Hevajra' found at Dharmanagar , Avolokiteswar found at Karimganj , Kachar, are the specimens which can led one to think that these areas come under Buddhist influence . So there may fall influence of Buddhism on Unakoti . In this context opinion of Shri Jayantanath Choudhry should be mentioned . He writes in his book 'Abrita Itihas Unakoti', Bengali, [p-19, published by Smt. Sulata Sarkar, Tharpakna, Ranchi] that there is a mixture of both Shaibism and Buddhism . There are also some figures at Unakoti , Jayantanath explains them as Buddhist deities . The dancing female image is of Nairatma as he opines [p-58]. Another figure generally known as Kamdeb which he calls 'Bajrananga Manjusri' [p—57] . But there is a little problem in identifying the images in this way . Because there are some dissimilarities between the images and the icons described in Buddhist iconography . Yet there may come a very humble

Buddhist influence of the Buddhist icons found at different places of Bengal . Other figures like 'Soumya Shiba', 'central Shiba head' - researcher notices some features in them which are also found in Buddhist images . 'Soumya Shiba' has a partly broken peacock under him . Peacock has a significance in buddhist iconography . J.N Banerjea writes in 'Some Early Literary and Archaeological Data About Tantricism' [published in 'Essays in Indian Art Religion and Society', edited by Krishna Mohan Shrimali, published by Munshiram Manoharlal publishers P.V.T L.T.D.] - "The text being read by the Buddhist monk is no other than the Mahayana text of Mahamayuri , its true nature being indicated cleverly by the artist by the insertion of the beautiful figure of the peacock very close . - The 'Great Formula of Peacock' is primarily a formula of protection against the serpents , the peacock being the natural enemy of snakes , but secondarily it can be considered as a sort of charm against poisons in general". [p—54]

The peacock form is closely connected with Buddhist deities like Mahamayuri, Bodhisatva Manjusri etc. The figure of Soumya Shiba at Unakoti - artist may receive the inspiration from the icon of Bodhisatva Manjusri while carving this figure . The terrific aspects of the central Shiba head known as Unakotiswar Kalbhairab are commonly found in the images of Mahakal found in Nepal, Tibet . Dr. Benoytosh Bhattacharya writes in 'The Indian Buddhist Iconography' [p—344-345, published by Firma K.L . Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1968] - "In Sadhanamala as well as in the Nispannayogavali there are

several descriptions of the ferocious Hindu god, Mahakala . Images of Mahakala abound in Nepal and are found in large numbers in Buddhist temples, monasteries and even in the streets . Sometimes the head only is represented ." At Unakoti central shiba is represented by head only . In Hindu iconography there is no such instruction to represent head only whereas such thing is in Buddhist tradition .

Rock-cut colossal images of Ganesha are also important . These specimens are unique in character . Three Ganeshas show four, six and eight arms respectively . Ganesha has been considered as Brahmanical deity first during Gupta period [ref:- 'Ganesha, Purane O Jeebane', published in Alokepat, Mitra publication , Oct. 1988] . Later Ganesha has been a major deity of Tantric Buddhism also . R.S. Singh writes in 'Hindu Iconography in Tantrayana Buddhism' [published by Ramanand Vidya Bhawan] -"Ganesa , the elephant headed god , has an important role in the system of Hindu worship - Vinayaka is also an important name of Ganesa (p-25) - The popularity of Ganesa , the bestower of success was not confined to the Brahman cult , for his adoration was taken over by the Buddhist .- Infact , Ganesa of Tantric Buddhism has a mysterious and dignified position ." [p-25]

Ganesha according to Buddhist iconography may be represented showing many arms and Unakoti Ganeshas as it has been mentioned, show four, six, eight arms . Author R.S. Singh writes in the same book -"He may have third eye and many arms , from four to sixteen[p-29]." Whether Unakoti

Ganeshas are Hindu deities or not - one has to think again and again about the matter . Also it is interesting to note that there is a Bishnu image in Ganesha panel of Unakoti . This Bishnu image is of 'Tribikram' Bishnu according to 'Siddhanta-Sanhita' [ref:-'Itihaser Aloke Shrihatte Abiskrita Bishnu(Tribikram) Murti', by Kamalakanta Gupta, published in Shrihatta Kacharer Prachin Itihas O Sanskritir Ruprekha, p-45, published by Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and Rabindra Smriti Granthagar] as it bears the four emblems - lotus, gada, sankhya, chakra in such a order which is similar to that of Tribikram form of Bishnu . Bishnu is also adopted by Buddhist Tantrics as their deity . Ganeshas of the panel also show three or four tusks which is amazing and uncommon . But in Tantric Buddhism , three headed Ganesha image is often found . In this case three or four tusks of Ganesha may indicate similar thing . Moreover , on the head of Ganesha with six arms there is a particular symbol which can be found in Buddhist iconography . Infact it is a Vajra placed on a lotus . Mention should be made in this connection from 'Elements of Buddhist Iconography' by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy [published by Munshiram Manoharlal publishers pvt.ltd.] -"In certain Buddhist representations the vajra is combined rather with the body of the Buddha than with the throne and this is probably to be connected with the late Tantrik form of Buddhism known as Vajrayana , the designation of the principal plane as Vajra-dhatu [p-43] . - The vajra plays a large part in Shingon symbolism and ritual [p-44] ." The short trident like form on

the head of Ganesha[six armed] is a vajra indeed and if so , then it can be assumed that this Ganesha of Unakoti has been worshipped by vajrayani Buddhists in the early ages . And there is a tradition among vajrayani deities that is to bear vajra on head [ref:- The Indian Buddhist Iconography , p-218]. In Ganesha panel of Unakoti , the Ganesha with four arms bears 'Jatamukuta' marked with cresent moon which can be seen in various Shiba images . In this connection opinion of Alice Getty should be mentioned . R.S. Singh writes in 'Hindu Iconography in Tantrayana Buddhism' [p-38] - "Ganapati is depicted here lying on his back with his head turned to the right . He is holding nothing in his hands . According to Alice Getty , Ganesha is fiured here not as a demon Vinayaka , but as a Hindu god Vinayaka because he wears the Jata-Mukuta of the Siva .104" So it can be assumed that the Ganesha [four armed] is related to Hinduism as it bears the Jatamukuta of Shiba . Also it should be mentioned that other two Ganeshas [six armed and eight armed] are the Vinayakas of vajrayana as they bear multiple tusks, vajra etc.

Another pair of images is to be discussed . There is a image of gigantic male deity with his female partner - both of them are known as Bhairab-Bhairabi . They may be connected with the concept of Hevajra and Nairatma . Male one bears garland of skulls . Dr. Benoytosh Bhattacharya describes the form of Hevajra in 'The Indian Buddhist Iconography' [p-157]- "In the Hevajra Mandala of Nispannayogavali , Heruka is the principal deity , thus showing that there is only a very thin line of

demarcation between the two , Heruka and Hevajra . When Heruka is accompanied with his Prajna , he begets the name of Hevajra . In the Mandala no less than four distinct forms of Hevajra are described . In all these , Hevajra is accompanied with his Sakti whose name differs according to the numbers of his hands . (i) Two Armed - Colour—Blue, Face - One, Arms—Two, Prajna— Nairatma

When two armed Heruka gets the name of Trailokyaksepa and his form is described in the following words - Trailokyaksepa (Heruka) blue in colour and dances in the Ardhaparyanka attitude He is one faced and two armed . With the left hand carrying the skull cup full of blood and marked with a vajra , he embraces his Prajna-Nairatma. The right holding the vajra is raised ." In case of Unakoti the male figure carries something in his left hand but the object is broken . The right arm is raised but it is also broken . In the same book author also writes -"The same form is again described in the Sadhanamala which gives the additional information that the Sakti carries the Kartri in the right hand and the kapala in the left"[p-157]. The female figure in the left of the male one also holds something in her left hand and the right is raised , at the same time it holds something perhaps –kartri . Now it is very difficult to say whether these figures are of Hevajra and Nairatma or not . Because they do not embrace each other and also do not follow the above mentioned instruction properly . Inspite of such dissimilarity it can be understood that there is a little influence of these Buddhist icons .

Next one is a female deity [Unakoti site museum] standing in 'Alidha' attitude . This female deity shows protruded belly and it may be compared to the icon of 'Parnasabari'. In this context opinion of N.N Bhattacharya should be mentioned - "The goddess of epidemic , Parnasabari, who was evidently a tribal adaptation, as her name implies , is regarded as an emanation of Aksobhya and / or of Amoghasiddhi . In one conception she is described as three-faced, the front one being of yellow complexion . In her six hands she holds a vajra, a parasu and an arrow on the right ones and in the left noose, cluster of leaves and bow . Her jatamukuta is decorated with flowers and an image of Aksobhya . She stands in Pratyalidha trampling under her feet the Vighnas (i.e. Ganesa) ." [ref:- 'Buddhism in the History of Indian Ideas', p-295, Manohar publication ,2000]

In case of Unakoti specimen, the figure stands in Alidha attitude which is just the reverse of Pratyalidha . Only one head and two arms are visible . But there are traces of other two arms in the stele . In Buddhist iconography posture or attitude is very important . So the image does not follow the iconographic features of Parnasabari . Rather it is much more similar to the icon of 'Arya-Vajrabarahi' . Dr. B. Bhattacharya writes in the book 'The Indian Buddhist Iconography' (p-219) about the icon of Arya-Vajrabarahi " Appearance – Terrible, Asana—Alidha, Arms—Four . The four armed form of Vajravarahi is also similar to the forms mentioned before , and is called Arya-vajravarahi . The difference lies only in the

attitude, number of arms, and the symbols carried in her hands . She carries in the two right hands the Vajra and the goad, and in the two left the Kapala and the Tarjani with the noose . She is one-faced and three eyed , and appears terrible with contortions of eye-brows, the adamantine excrescence , and the protruding tongue, teeth and belly . She stands in the Alidha attitude on the corpse , unlike the other forms of Vajravarahi . The Khattvanga hangs from her left shoulder as usual ." [according to the Sadhana no.- 224, Sadhanamala] Now in case of Unakoti it can be seen that the female deity holds the goad in upper right hand , lower right is broken, only trace of it can be seen . In the left , upper hand holds something like kapala or skull bowl while lower one shows the fingers creating noose against her chest . The figure is in Alidha attitude and has protruded belly . Something is there under her perhaps the corpse . She shows no khattvanga on her left shoulder [perhaps broken], but there is a garland of skulls. Another specimen collected in Unakoti site museum is of a female deity seated in Maharajlila . It may be related to any form of Tara . It shows vajra in left hand and something is there in the right . Probably it bears a miniature image on it's crown [it should be Dhyani Buddha] . All these features— the vajra, the image on crown support the fact that it has a connection with Buddhist icon like Tara . It is very difficult to identify such image as it is in very bad condition and the emblems are damaged . Mention should be made from The Indian Buddhist Iconography [p-306] "Strictly speaking , only

those deities can be called Taras to whom the mantra : Om Tare Tuttare Ture Svaha is assigned . In the simplest form Taras carry the night lotus in the left hand and exhibit the varada mudra in the right . Some of them bear the miniature image of Amoghasiddhi on their crowns , but others may not have any affigy of the Dhyani-Buddha . It is therefore difficult to identify their images, particularly in stone where no definite colour can be seen ."

Another figure of Unakoti is of a female deity who is trampling someone with her left leg . She is in Alidha attitude and carries vajra and kapala with left hands . In Tibetian Buddhism often the tradition is found , that is to humilate Hindu deities by trampling under feet . And in Tibetian sculpture gods and goddesses are often found standing on Hindu deities like Ganesha , Bishnu etc . The Unakoti specimen may be connected with the Tibetian tradition as it also stands on a figure which is not yet identified .

One head is also found at Unakoti which may be Buddha head as it shows such features . It is suspected that at the time when Brahmanical Hinduism rises then an attempt has been taken by the orthodox , fanatic people to destroy Buddhist images of Unakoti . As a result of detailed study evidence of such activity is found . Buddhism has been washed out from Unakoti and the remains have been intentionally as well as wrongly identified as Hindu deities by those priestly class people . Some images are still there at Unakoti which put a question mark in front of the declaration - Unakoti is a Hindu

pilgrimage . After discussing about various probabilities it can be understood that at the time when buddhism is in flourishing stage in Bengal and other adjoining areas then Tripura also comes under the influence of Tantric Buddhism and Unakoti as a part of Tripura can not be free from Buddhist influences . Though there is hardly any trace of direct presence of Buddhism , Unakoti specimens have been influenced by Buddhist concepts . As it has been assumed that nathpanthi saivaites come to Unakoti and all these Buddhist influences may come to Unakoti alongwith Nath religion as nathism also derives from Vajrayana .

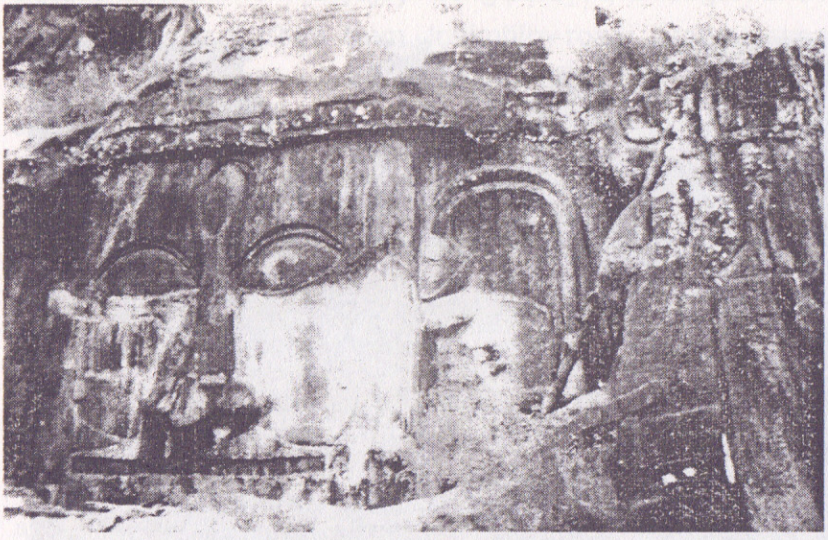
Apart from Unakoti also there are some places which are full of archaeological remains and not very far from Unakoti . Such a place is Noonchera [Diyajoy reang para] , Chinibagan and it is at a distance of 10km. from Unakoti[by road] . One colossal shiba linga is found here [26 feet] . Also there are some stone carvings and these are not identified . The shiba linga has two or three snakes carved on it . Darlong – Reang people who are the inhabitants of this small tribal village have their own belief that - there are some snakes, rabbits and rats inside the colossal shiba linga and at the time of Shiba ratri all these come out of their home and keep playing . Art-works made on the shiba-stone are stylistically similar to the art of Unakoti . And for this it is assumed that the place is nothing but an extention of Unakoti .

Also there are some places which are not very far from Unakoti and such a place is Dharmanagar[20km.] . The broken piece

Soumya Shiba

Peacock under Soumya Shiba

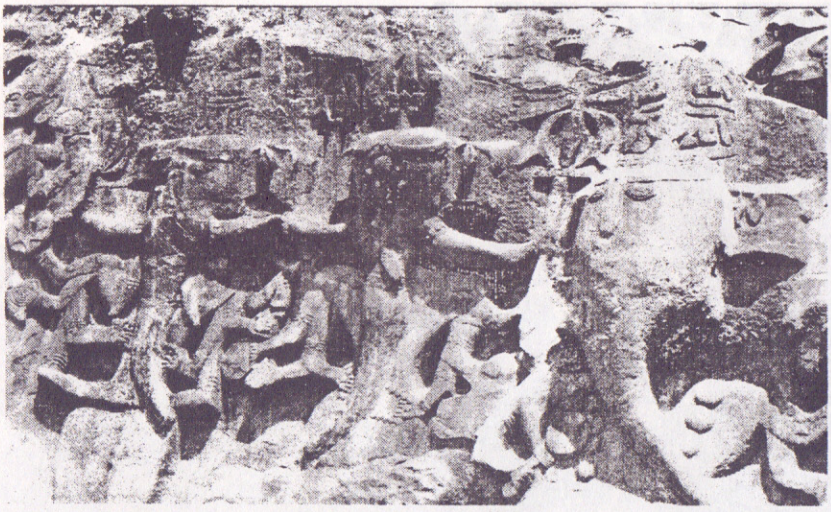
Peacock (in detail)



Central Shiba, Unakoti

Sweta Bhairab, Nepal

Bhairab, Nepal



Ganeshas, Unakoti

Ganeshas with multiple heads

Mandala showing 'Vajra' Symbols

Fig. H. Vajra-Dhata symbol of the five Dhyani Buddhas.
After Omura seigai, Sanbon Ryobu, Mandara.

'Vajra-Dhatu' Symbol

Ganesha showing 'Vajra' symbol on head, Unakoti

Mahakala showing 'Visva Vajra' on crown, Sonamura

Ganesha showing 'Vajra' on head Unakoti

Heruk, Vikrampur, Bengal

Gigantic male deity, Unakoti

Female deity, Unakoti

Nairatma, 10th century, Bihar

Female deity with protruded belly, Unakoti

Parnasabari, Vikrampur, Bengal

Seated female deity

Deity trampling some one with left leg

Buddha ?

of stone sculpture found at Rani Rasmani Road beside Juri river in the year 1953 is very much important as it's stylistic features are very similar to that of the Bengal sculpture of 11th century . From iconographical point of view this is an icon of Nataraj Shiba as it holds a serpent on head with first two hands and also next two hands are in dancing attitude . Symmetrically designed stele shows that it is a product of 11th century and such icons of Nataraj are often found in Bengal which belong to the period between 10th and 12th century .

Another broken image of Shiba found at the village of Kalachera near Dharmanagar town is of great importance . It shows it's linga upward and it is a common feature of the icon of Yogi Shiba . Similar images are found in Assam . Uma-maheswar[10th century] collected from Dabaka, Vanahara[10th-

11th century] collected from Narakasur hill [these are in Assam State Museum] - all these specimens show similar erected organ of Shiba . Dr. R.D Choudhry [ex director, Assam State Museum] explains the matter while describing the image of Vanahara in his book 'The Sculptures of Assam'[p-46, published by Assam State Museum] like this -"The most important feature from the iconography point of view is the urdhvaretas or raised organ which would indicate that it is the image of Siva in his yogic posture ." The Kalachera specimen is also of yogi Shiba as it also shows the organ erected . Stylistically the image belongs to 10th-11th century and it can be compared to the images collected from Udaipur, Tripura . Smoothly carved belly, decorated belt, flowing drapery of the Kalachera Shiba can be compared to the similar features of Bengal sculptures of 10th-11th centuries .

Among several other sculptures found in the locality the Shiba-linga found at Kalachera is very important . It is not a full one rather it is made as a half linga .

Apart from these specimens the villages of Hurua, Nadiapur are also full of the ruins of ancient constructions . Almost fifty two spots have been noticed by researcher which are full of earthed brick walls . The size of brick is 9inches x 11inches while thickness is less than 2inches or 2inches . Important places are - house of Shri Suren Malakar[north Hurua], house of Shri Gangesh Malakar [north Hurua] etc. A long time ago a gold coated image has been found in the fishery of Shri Babul Chanda [north Hurua] and has been taken by the royal

servants as Shri Suren Malakar says . After hearing the description of the statue from Shri Malakar it has been suspected that the image is of Hevajra which is often mentioned by different writers . It is often told by the villagers that many things are found from these ruins such as - utensils made of brass, gold, coins etc. But nothing is still seen by researcher except architectural ruins and stack of ancient bricks .

MANIKYA SCULPTURE

All the specimens found at Pilak, Deotamura, Udaipur, Unakoti etc are of pre-Manikya period(before 15th c AD). Also some relief pieces of Manikya period are found in Tripura. Though they have no stylistic connection with the pre mentioned works still they deserve a special mention.

Few rock cut figures of this period (15th c onwards) are found in different places of Tripura. A stone pillar collected from Amarpur of south Tripura shows various small images of hindu deities carved on it. Each of them is carved in a very localized folk style. No anatomical perfection is there, rather these are very simple and sometimes very funny. Works of this period have no stylistic connection with the pre mentioned carving styles which are of early period. These pillar images are similar to the images of Ahom sculptures. Most of the figures show peculiar sitting posture. Upper portion of the body has been carved frontally while lower portion is in profile. Ahom sculptures of 16th-17th century also show such body posture. Each figure of the pillar is bounded by multifoiled arch on the

top and also there are some vegetal motifs engraved vertically on the pillar and the particular motifs are prevalent in the architecture of Muslim period. Such motifs and use of such multifoiled arch have been a major characteristic feature of sculptural art as well as art of architecture in late mediaeval period. Also a particular variety of crown can be seen on the head pf each figure.Actully it is a head –dress made of feathers or long leaves.Conventional Mukutas are not seen.These are very linear in natute.Rythmic soft lines and simplified animated forms are life of this style.This style of carving differs form that of Unakoti relief works which are rigid,bold with their column like limbs,colossal size, geometric patterns and violent expressions.

While Manikya sculptures are soft,fancy,folkish and highly decorated with Islamic motifs.Engraved stone images of Radhanagar, Akhaura are the important works of Manikya period.Mythological stories related of the cult of Vishnu have been depicted on stone slabs.Narrative quality of the works is noticeable.Each composition is bordered with engraved rectangular linear frame and also there is a final outer border engraved almost at the edges of the slab.Between the two borders the place is decorated with floral and vegetal motifs generally used in Islamic arts and architectures.The subject matter depicted inside the frame is carved in a very folkish manner.Similar narrative language and folkish forms decorated with Islamic motifs can be noticed in late mediaeval sculpture of different places of Bengal and Assam.

Another important Manikya sculpture is a stone image of lion found at Mahadev bari temple complex of Udaipur. The specimen is of 16th 17th century probably. It can be compared to the lion image of 16th or 17th c. collected from Mibong, N.C. Hills. This stone image of Mibong is very similar to the specimen of Mahadev bari. Such animal forms are commonly seen in the sculptures of Ahom period. This type of animal motif has been used to decorate Manikya coins also . Wood carvings of Ahom period found at Barpeta , Assam are also of the similar style i.e. Ahom style . Sculptures of Ahom period are stylistically similar to Manikya sculptures.

Ahom Manikya style has been developed as a local style , it has no connection with pre practiced carving styles of 10th, 11th, 12th centuries. Perfection and quality of Pala Sena sculptures are absent in this very folk style of late mediaeval. In this context opinion of R.D Choudhury can be mentioned – "The Ahom artists made a complete departure from the pre Ahom Pala style while executing their art work . The classical formula was completely ignored because of , possibly , a generation gap." Manikya sculptures particularly the carving style is nothing but a localized form of Ahom style of late mediaeval.

Style of Unakoti relief is also a locally developed carving style but it is a local school of early period which has no connection with the very folk , funny looking Ahom Manikya sculptures though both the styles (Unakoti and Ahom Manikya) differ

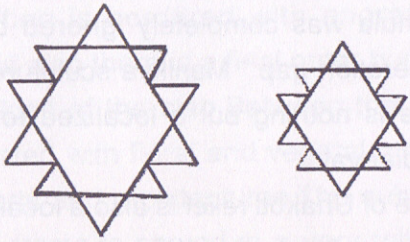
from the so called Pala Sena style or the style prevalent in early mediaeval and mid mediaeval period.

CHAKRA CONSTRUCTED OF TEN TRIUANGLES DRAWN ON BULL'S BACK, UNAKOTI

The next two chakras are each constructed of ten triangles. Called sarvartha-sadhaka and Sarvarakshakara. Acomplisher of All Purpose and Giver of Protection, they indicate a stage when inner realization being to dawn.

Sarvartha-sadhaka chakra

Sarvarakshakara chakra



COURTESY :- THE TANTRIC WAY (P-60) AJIT MUKHERJEE MADHU KHANNA THAMES AND HUDSON

Dense forest on Noonchera

Decorated Rock (Locally worshipped as Shibalinga), Noonchera

Decorated rock (in detail), Noonchera

Decorated rock (in detail), Noonchera

Triangular mitifs carved on rock, Noonchera

Decorated rock (locally regarded as Devishila), Noonchera

Devi Shila Decorated with serpant motifs, Noonchera (in detail)

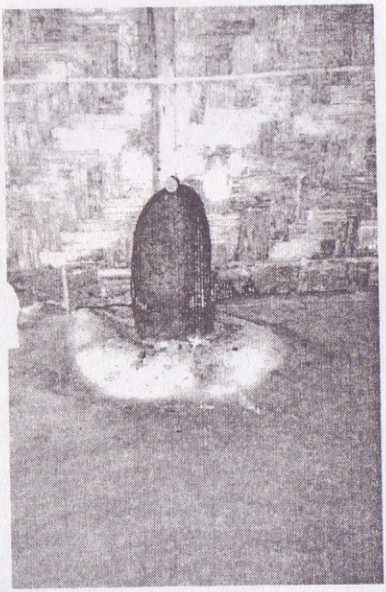
Devi Shila decorated with serpant motifs, Noonchera (in detail)

Bids carved on rock, Noonchera

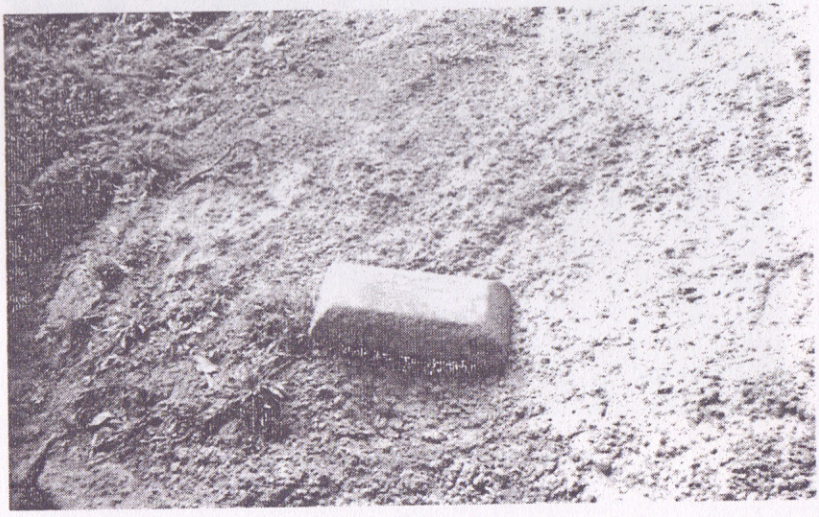
Carved Frog ? Noonchera

Broken image of Shiba (Urdhavareta), Kalachera

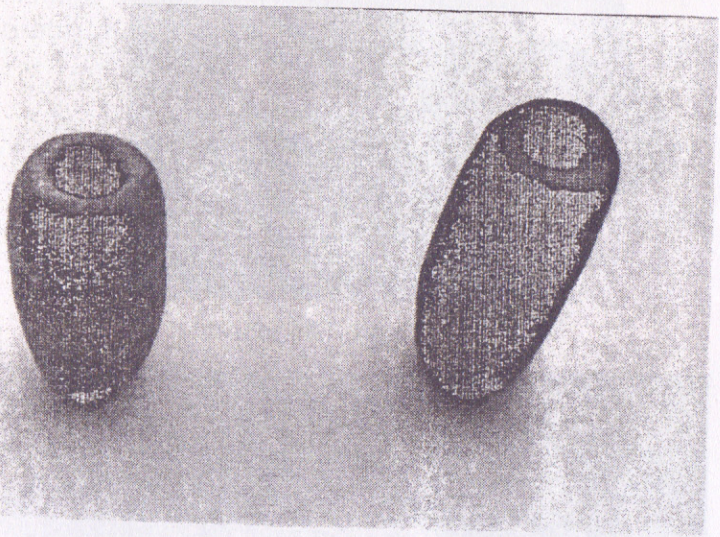
Lower portion of a sculpture (broken), Kalachera



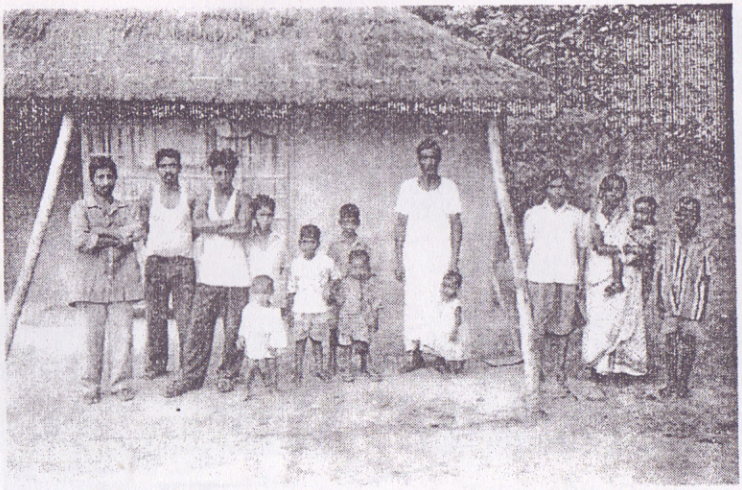
Linga, Kalachera



Rock-Cut Slab, Hurua

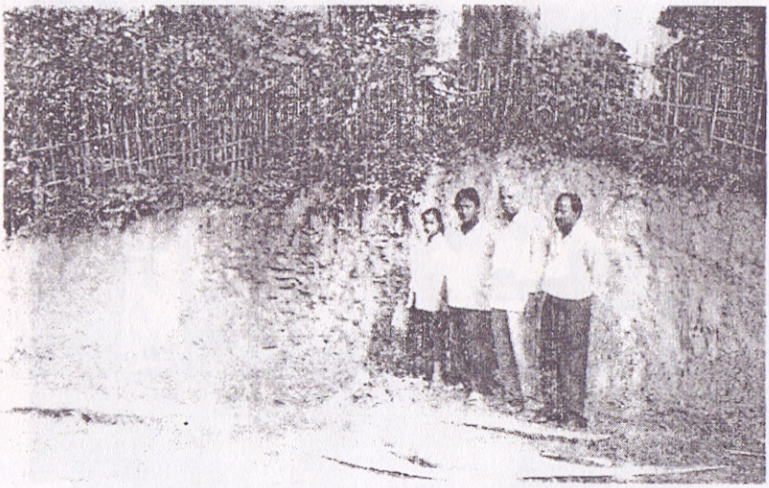


Terracotta objects, North Hurua, Dharmanagar



Suren Malakar with his family,
North Hurua

Trace of brick-construction in
the house of Suren Malakar,
North Tripura



Stupa like architecture under
Mound, House of Shri Gangesh Malakar,
North Tripura

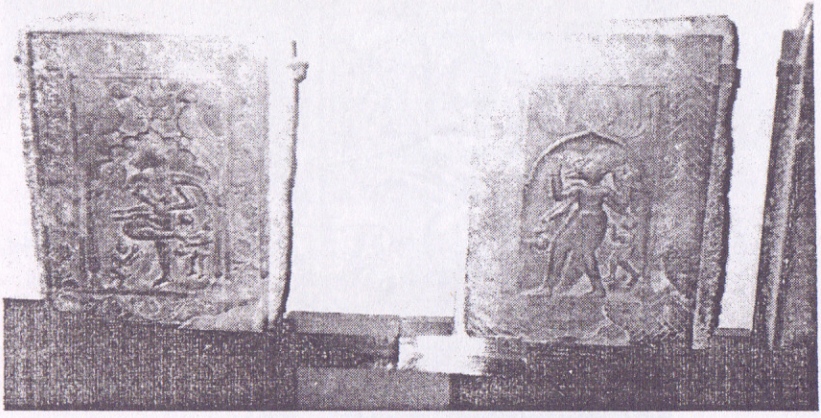
Pieces of ancient bricks pecovered
from the mound

Radha-Krishna, 18th Century, Radhanagar, Tripura

Kalki, 18th Century, Raadhanagar, Tripura

Krishna, 18th Century, Radhanagar, Tripura

Stone Plaques Collected From
Radhanagar Akhaura, Tripura



Lakshmi, 15th- 16th Century, Amarpur

Lion, 16-17th Century, Udaipur

Devi, 16th-17th Century, Kamalasagar

Deity with five heads and bow (Bhairab) Unakoti

Male figure, 10th-11th century, Madankamdev, Assam

5

A Comparative approach with neighboring States, Assam, Bangladesh, Tibet, Cambodia.

Among Unakoti specimens, the single piece sculptures as it has been mentioned in the chapter -4- 'Sculpture', have some stylistical relation with 10th – 12th century Assam and Bengal Sculptures. Assam during 10th-11th Centuries show Sculptures carved in high relief on stele and the process has been adopted from Bengal art of 10th-11th centuries . Typical stele designing of 10th, 11th century Bengal art can be observed in the single piece sculptures of Unakoti and it has been also a major characteristic feature of 10th, 11th century Assam Sculpture. Bengal as well as Assam the influence of these neighbouring areas can be noticed in single piece sculptures of Unakoti. Among single piece works of Unakoti. There are some specimens which are of early 10th century. Steles free from complex designs are surely of early 10th century as it has been observed also in the art of Bengal and Assam during that period. If 'Pala-sena' style of Bengal art is properly studied,

then it can be easily understood that during 8th, 9th and 10th centuries, sculptures carved following the style, show steles with rounded top and there are no complex designs on the steles. This type of sculptures have been found in Unakoti also. In later period i.e. 11th, 12th century, an evolution can be noticed in 'Pals-Sena' style . Now rather than rounded tops, sharp pointed tops can be found and the steles also start showing animated small figures, objects, designal patterns carved on them. And these objects are now composed in a particular order so that both the sides of the stele look similar. It has been discussed in chapter -4-compositional aspect briefly. This type of sculptures are also found at 'Unakoti'. Now in case of relief work, it is different. As it can be observed that Unakoti relief works and also single piece sculptures are directly influnced by 10th – 12th century Bengal art and also it has been discussed in the chapter-4, it can be seen now art of Bengle leaves it's influence on both single piece and relief sculptures of Unakoti. It is need less to mention again that single piece sculptures are very much similar to that of 10th – 11th century Bengal art. But the relief works are stylistically different, though they also bear various features of Bengal art. Violent facial expressions are very similar to that of Tibetian sculpture. So here an admixture of Bengal art and Tibetian art can be found. From 12, 13th centuries Tibetian art starts showing typical mask-like pattern of face which is more or less squarish and also elongated ears as usual, At Unakoti similar features can be observed –in this case faces are more

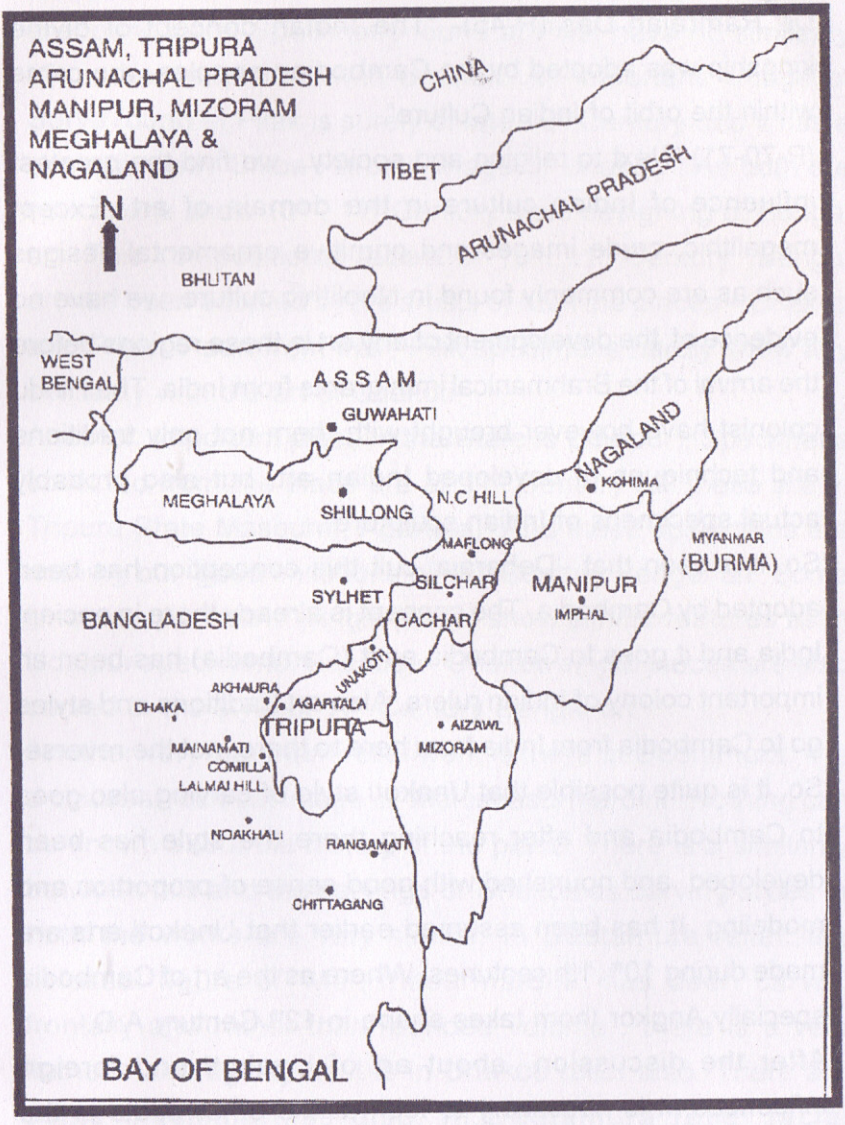
or less squarish , ears are elongated and broad. Tibetian paintings and sculptures from 12th to 14th-15th century show mask like , squarish face with terrible expression. Though way of representation is much more superior to Unakoti.

Though, comparison between art of Unakoti and the art of Tibet is the main work here, still to be completed, another place of Tripura-'Sonamura', specimen found at this place should be mentioned to show the influence of Tibetian art on this entire area.

One 'Mahakal' image found at sonamura(Now is in Agartala Museum) is very significant. And at Boxanagar of sonamura an ancient Buddhist memorial architecture has been found as it has been mentioned in chapter-4. 'Mahakala' image found at Sonamura which is wrongly identified as 'Bhairab' by museum authority, shows similar iconographic features as these are in Tibetian Mahakal the vajra chopper, the skull bowl, the standing posture on corpse, everything. And this very iconographic similarity helps researcher to think in this way. Buddhist rituals practiced in Boxanagar, Sonamura in early ages may have some connection with Northern Buddhism. Though, Unakoti, neither iconographically nor ritualistically, is connected with Tibetian religion or art, but stylistic features of Tibetian art are commonly found in Unakoti relief. Sonamura specimen of 'Mahakala' has been carved in the style of Tibetian art. Unakoti relief works also bear features of Tibetian art. So, this is fact that there is an influence of Tibetian art in some of the sculptures of Tripura including

Unakoti relief . Chinese art of that time also shows similar features . The reason behind such connection, will be discussed later in chapter-7.

Dr.Ratna Das tries to show similarity between Unakoti relief and Bayon heads of Cambodia in her book 'Art and Artitecture of Tripura'(P-51). Colossal heads of Angkor-thom, Cambodia, are somehow similar to those of Unakoti because , in both the cases , only colossal heads have been represented as the deities. Other portions of body are not carved. This is the main similarity between the two, But stylistically , there is a large difference between Unakoti heads and the heads of Angkorthom, Combodia. If properly studied, Cambodian heads show rounded volumes and better sense of modeling while at Unakoti, the heads are devoid of modeling, rounded volumes rather they are flat, stiff and have been carved in shape of geometric forms-rectangle, square etc. For instance, if central shiba head Unakotiswar Kalbhairab is observed, flatness of the statue, stiff straight nose, very linear drawings of eyes, geometric forms of mouth, teeth etc are seen. And the face has no stylistical relation with Cambodian heads with better modellings, rounded volume of nose, muscles and very natural lips, eye-lids etc. In case of Unakoti the heads are very formal, stylized and full of rigidity as well as violence. In this connection Dr. Das also writes about 'Debaraja' cult of Cambodia in her book 'Art and Architecture of Tripura'[p—47]. But re-searcher thinks about the matter in different way. Mention should be made from 'Art Traditions of Cambodia' by


ASSAM, TRIPURA
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
MANIPUR, MIZORAM
MEGHALAYA &
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N
CHINA
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ARUNACHAL PRADESH
BHUTAN
WEST
BENGAL
ASSAM
GUWAHATI
NAGALAND
KOHIMA
MEGHALAYA
SHILLONG
N.C HILL
MAFLONG
MYANMAR
(BURMA)
SILCHAR
MANIPUR
SYLHET
IMPHAL
BANGLADESH
CACHAR
UNAKOTI
AKHAURA
DHAKA
AGARTALA
TRIPURA
AIZAWL
MIZORAM
MAINAMATI
COMILLA
LALMAI HILL
NOAKHALI
RANGAMATI
CHITTAGANG
BAY OF BENGAL

MAP - 4

Dr. Ramrajan Das (P-45)- "The Indian concept of divine kingship was adopted by the Cambodian peoples who came within the orbit of Indian Culture".

(P-70-71) "Next to religion and society , we find the greatest influence of Indian culture in the domain of art. Except megalithic, crude images and primitive ornamental designs such as are commonly found in Neolithic culture, we have no evidence of the development of any art in these regions before the arrival of the Brahmanical immigrants from India. The Hindu colonist have however brought with them not only traditions and techniques of developed Indian art, but also probably actual specimens of Indian sculpture".

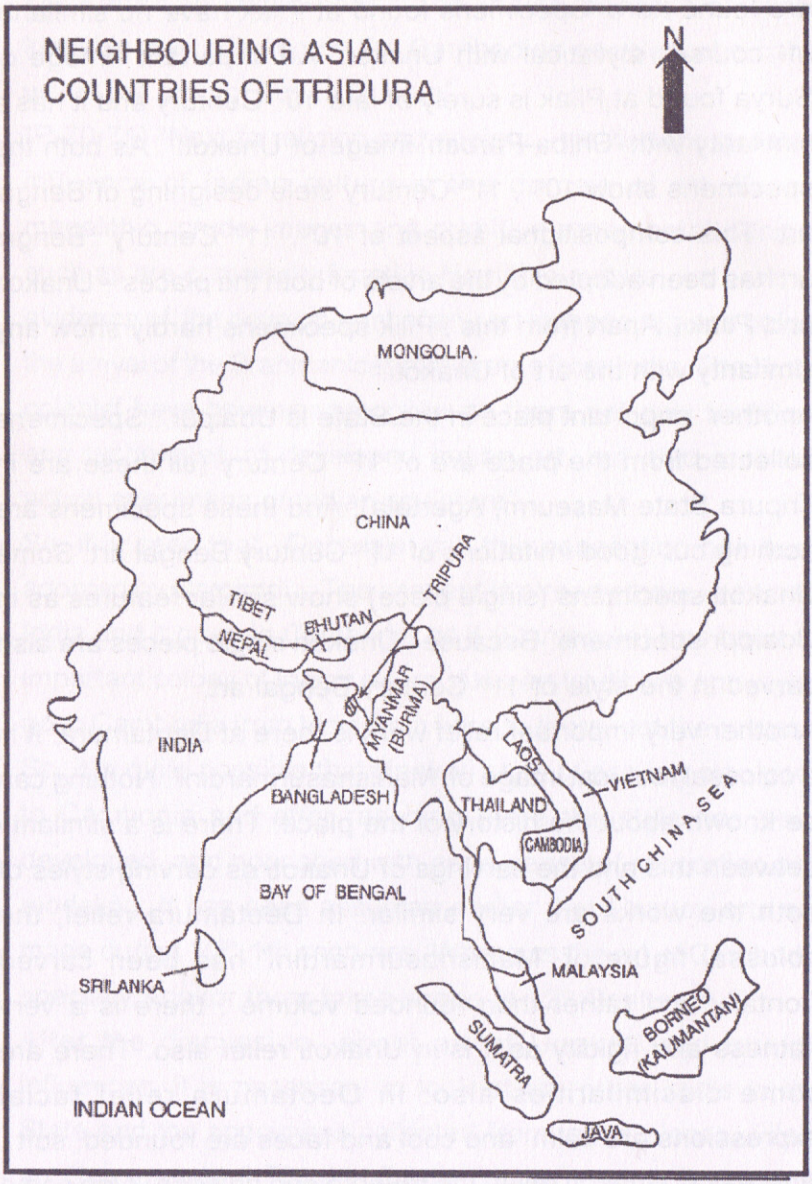
So, it is seen that -'Debaraja' cult this conception has been adopted by Cambodia. The concept is already there in ancient India and it goes to Cambodia as it (Cambodia) has been an important colony of Indian rulers. Also art traditions and styles go to Cambodia from India from here to there, not the reverse. So, it is quite possible that Unakoti style of carving also goes to Cambodia and after reaching there the style has been developed and nourished with good sense of proportion and modeling. It has been assumed earlier that Unakoti arts are made during 10th ,1th centuries. Where as the art of Cambodia specially Angkor thom takes shape in 12th Century A.D.

After the discussion about art of Unakoti and foreign influences, it is necessary to look at the other spots in the State and the specimens collected from those places. Pilak- another important Place in South Tripura – many specimens

are found here. Specimens found at Pilak have no similarity of- course stylistical with Unakoti. An important image of Surya found at Pilak is surely of late 10th Century and it has a similarity with 'Shiba-Parbati' image of Unakoti . As both the specimens show 10th , 11th Century stele designing of Bengal art. This compositional aspect of 10th, 11th Century Bengal art has been adopted by the artists of both the places – Unakoti and Pilak . Apart from this , Pilik specimens hardly show any similarity with the art of Unakoti.

Another important place in the State is Udaipur . Specimens collected from the place are of 11th Century (all these are in Tripura State Maseurm, Agartala), And these specimens are nothing but good imitations of 11th Century Bengal art. Some Unakoti specimens (single piece) show similar features as in Udaipur specimens. Because , Unakoti single pieces are also carved in the style of 11th Century Bengal art.

Another very important relief work is there at Deotamura. It is a colossal rock-cat image of 'Mahishasurmardini'. Nothing can be known about the history of the place. There is a similarity between this and the carvings of Unakoti as carving styles of both the works are very similar. In Deotamura relief, the colossal figure of 'Mahishasurmardini' has been carved frontally and rather than rounded volume , there is a very flatness and rigidity as it is in Unakoti relief also. There are some dissimilarities also. In Deotamura relief facial expressions are calm and cool and faces are rounded, soft , whereas in Unakoti relief, the reverse can be seen. Also some


NEIGHBOURING ASIAN
COUNTRIES OF TRIPURA
N
MONGOLIA.
CHINA
TRIPURA
TIBET
BHUTAN
NEPAL
MYANMAR
(BURMA)
INDIA
BANGLADESH
LAOS
VIETNAM
THAILAND
CAMBODIA
SOUTH CHINA SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
MALAYSIA
SRILANKA
SUMATRA
BORNEO
(KALIMANTAN)
INDIAN OCEAN
JAVA

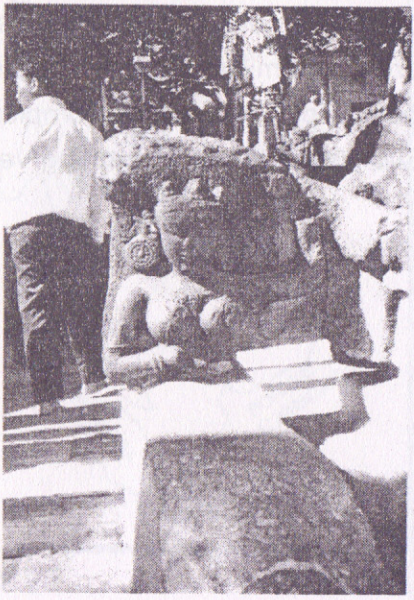
MAP - 5

architectural forms like arch can be found at Deotmura while no such feature is found at Unakoti.

Probably Deotamura specimens are products of later period. orth Tripura, at Dharmanagar a broken image of 'Nataraja' has been found as it has been mentioned in Chapter-4. Stylistically the image follows 11th Century Bengal art. Single piece images of Unakoti which are probably of 11th Century show similar features as in this specimen. Another important piece of Sculpture 'Siba showing his linga upward' is very much significant and this is also made in the same period.

Unakoti relief works have an important connection with the works of Noon Chhara. The , triangular forms, carved on the shibalinga of Noonchhera are also found commonly in the relief work of Unakoti . And also the rounded forms , bids are common motifs . Stylistically specimens of both the places are very similar. So, it can be assumed that Noonchhera has been a part of Unakoti complex as the distance between the two places is not something very long.

Chaturmukhalinga, Unakoti



Devi, Kamakhya Hill, Assam

Uma-Maheswar, Unakoti

Uma-Maheswar, 10th century, Dabaka, Assam

Central Shiba, Unakoti

Raktayamari father-mother, 15th century, Tibet

Ekamukhalinga, Unakoti

Hayagriva, 12th- 13th ce ntury, Tibet

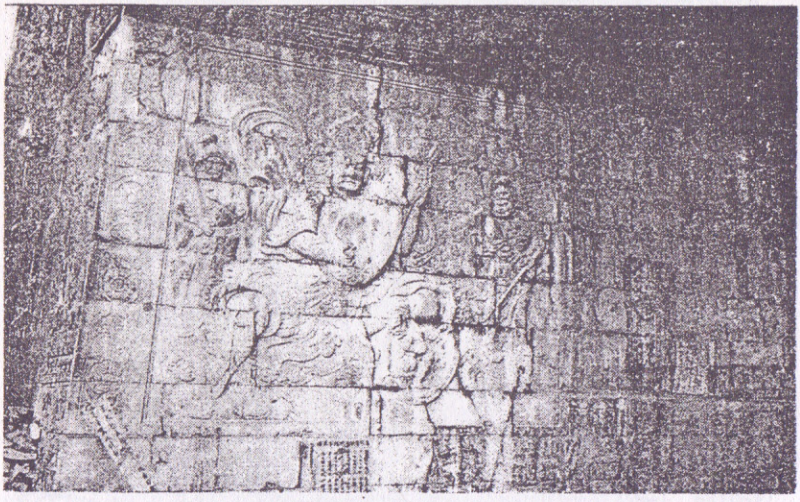
Gigantic Deity, Unakoti

Vəjrasattva, Tebet

Mahakal, Sonamura

Mahakala Pranjara
Natha, 14th Century,
Tibet

Gigantic Diety, Unakoti



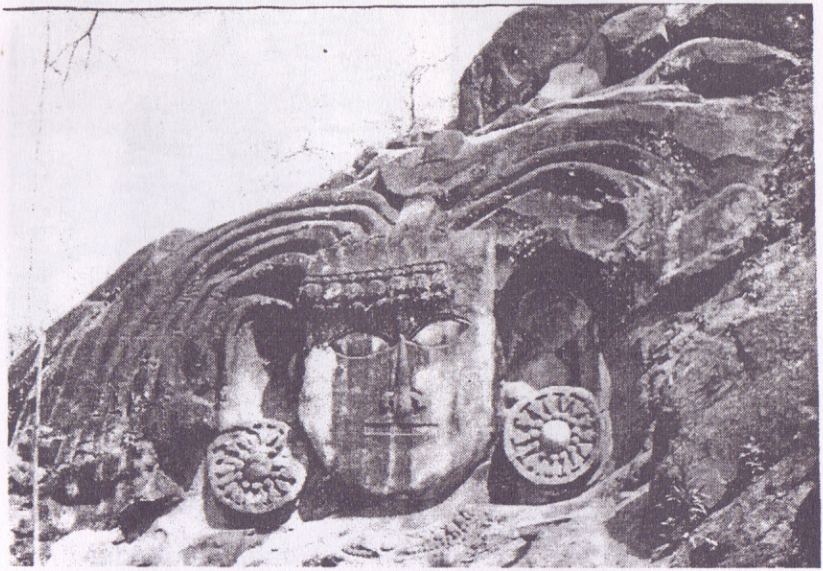
Dharitarashtra, Chu You ng Kuan Arch-Way, 1345 A.D.

Head, Angkor Thom, Cambodia

Ugra Shiba, Unakoti

Central Shiba, Unakoti

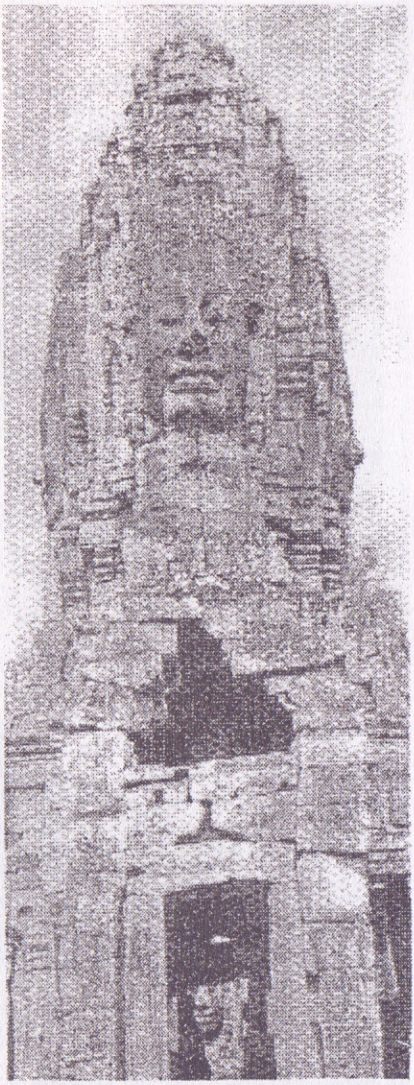
Soumya Shiba, Unakoti



Shiba with united hairs, Unakoti

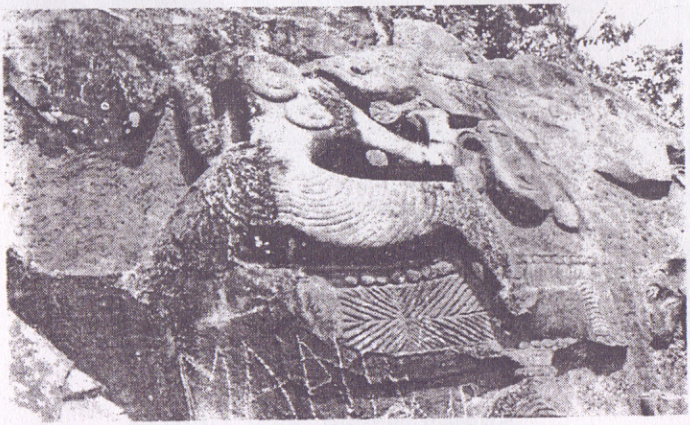
Ekamukhalinga, Unakoti

Face, Unakoti



Head, Cambodia

Apsaras, 12th century, Angkor Thom, Cambodia

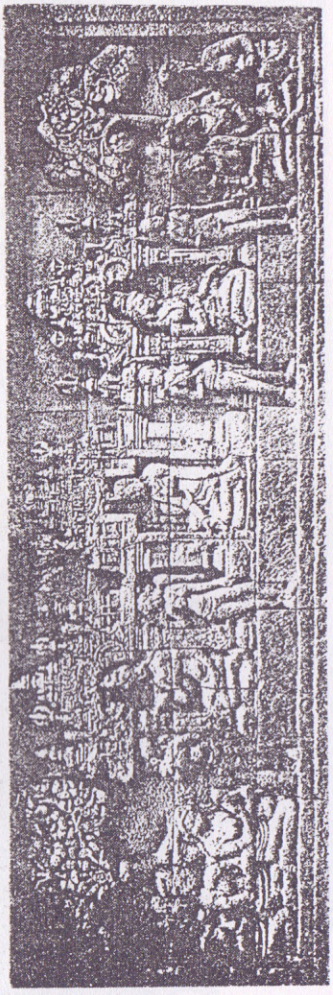


Dancing female deity, Unakoti

Female deity in bhadrasana, Unakoti

Seated female deity, Unakoti

Ganesha panel, Unakoti



Relief panel. Barabodur, Java

Shiba-Parbati, Unakoti

Surya, 10th century, Pilak

FEMALE DEITY ON THE RIGHT
SIDE OF CENTRAL SHIBA

Triangular motifs carved on rock, Noonchera

Triangular motifs carved on the head band of ugra shiba, Unakoti

6

CONCLUSION

After discussing various aspects of Unakoti it is clear that the place has been a portion of ancient 'Chandrapuri vishay' as it is discussed briefly in chapter -1 . Further explanation is needed to clarify the matter . Unakoti is just a part of Chandrapuri not the whole of it . According to the description of Dr. Niharranjan Roy [Bangalir Itihas, p-630-632] Chandrapuri - constructed by Shri Chandra has eight 'Maths' in it . Among them four Maths[monasteries] named 'Deshantari Math' are donated for non-Bengali Brahmins, pilgrims and and the other four Maths are for Bengali pilgrims and these Maths are known as 'Bangal Math' . These two types of Maths need to be located in this region . In chapter-4, villages of Kalachera, Hurua near Dharmanagar of north Tripura have been mentioned as many things broken pieces of sculpture, Shiba linga, architectural ruins are found in this area . Stylistical features of the broken sculptures as it has been discussed in chapter 4 are similar to the features of 10^{th}-11^{th} century Bengal

sculptures . And this is the time when Chandrapuri is being developed . Various objects, sculptures, architectural ruins found in the locality are surely the traces of the existence of Chandrapuri . Utensils like kusha-kushi, sankhya, copper made objects are very much related to Brahmanical Hinduism of Bengal . So it can be imagined that some of these four 'Bangal Math's are established in this locality . Shiba image of Kalachera, Hevajra of north Hurua, Nataraj of Dharmanagar all these are products of 10th-11th centuries as the features show . Four major deities worshipped in Chandrapuri according to Niharranjan Roy are Baiswanar or Agni, Yogeswar Shiba, Jaimani and Mahakal Shiba [Bangalir Itihas,p-631] . Traces of these deities are found in the adjoining localities . In Kailashahar and also in Maulabi bazaar of Sylhet some rounded architectural patterns like well are found and these are locally known as 'Homer gaat'. These are for Agni worship according to vedic tradition . So cult of Agni or fire god has been worshipped in the region in early ages . The broken image of Shiba found at Kalachera is undoubtedly an image of Yogeswar Shiba as it shows erected organ which has been a common feature of Yogi Shiba as discussed in chapter-4 . Such images of 10th 11th centuries are commonly found in Assam and Bengal .

Jaimani—writer of Purba- mimansa philosophy nothing can be said about him . Mahakal Shiba, actually a deity of Tantric Buddhism , is another deity worshipped in Chandrapuri . The central head of Unakoti known as

Unakotiswar Kalbhairab may be an icon of Mahakal Shiba as it shows similar features . In Nepal also, a Mahakal image has been wrongly identified as Kalbhairab perhaps because of the very iconographic similarity.

Mahakal worshipped at Chandrapuri shows that the district has been made not for Hindu Brahmins only but also for the Tantric Buddhists . The icon of Hevajra found at north Hurua near Dharmanagar is important in this connection . Actually the period [10th-11th century] when Chandrapuri is being developed is very much important as it is a transition period . Buddhism is declining and Brahmanical Hinduism is coming to the position. The period can be known as the period of revival of Hinduism . In this period Buddhism specially Tantric Buddhism has been mixed up with Hinduism . Till eleventh century Buddhism with it's different sects survives in Bengal but after the period Brahmanical religion starts returning with the help of orthodox Sena rulers . So Unakoti as it is a product of such period shows Buddhist features as well as Hindu . The trend can be understood if the story of the kings of Chandra dynasty and their religious belief is properly studied . Early Chandra kings including Shri Chandra have been Buddhists . But later kings like Larah Chandra, Gobinda Chandra become Hindu one Vaishnava and the other nath panthi Shaibaite . In society of that period similar trend can be observed . People go toward Hinduism . In such a period Chandrapuri is developed and Unakoti as a part of Chandrapuri is evidence of hinduisation in this non-aryan area

of present Tripura . Also there are Buddhist icons at Unakoti and this is because of the Nath saints who are supposed to be Tantric Buddhists in their early stage [ref:-'Nath Sampradayer Itihas', p-239-240,307,by Dr. N.C Nath] . Aim of constructing such pilgrimage like Chandrapuri is to preach Brahmanical Hinduism as well as Buddhism in the area inhabited by tribal people . And the 'Deshantari Math's for non-Bengali people as described in copper plate may indicate shrines for the tribal population of the area . Kukis or Kirats the early inhabitants of the region are said to be outsiders or foreign people as they come from China through Tibet in unknown past . Perhaps for this the shrine made for them has been known as Deshantari Math . Though they have been Hindus or Buddhists they never discard or disregard their original cultural traditions and taste . And perhaps for this Unakoti relief images show tribal dresses and ornaments . Local people mixes their pre-fostered notions with new religious traditions . Establishment of Chandrapuri vishay by Shri Chandra in this region is very important matter as it shows that an attempt has been taken by the rulers of Bengal to preach Hinduism as well as Buddhism in tribal areas of the state . It can be assumed that after Shri Chandra when his ancestor Gobinda Chandra becomes the king he helps Nath religion to be preached here as he also has been nathpanthi Shaibaite . Influence of nathism can be seen at Unakoti , and the fish form, the tortoise image etc. are directly related to nathism . Some of the nath yogis bear a particular title 'Pa'

and they have a close connection with Tibet as Dr. Nath opines [Nath Sampradayer Itihas, p-308] . In tribal dialects also there is a word –'Pa' i.e. father or superior one . At the time of Gobinda Chandra he may invite nath saints to come to Unakoti [Chandrapuri] and teach their philosophy as well as religion . Not only Unakoti but in the other parts of Chandrapuri Dharmanagar, Kalachera etc. many Shiba images are found which are iconographically related to nath philosophy . The image of Nataraj is found at Dharmanagar and it should be remembered in this context that Gobinda Chandra has been a worshipper of Nateswar Bhattarak . Also the Shiba image found at Kalachera is 'Urdhareta' form of yogi Shiba . And the icon is very much related to nath philosophy particularly the tradition of 'Kaya-sadhana sadhana' to be 'Urdhareta' [person who has controlled fully his sexual desires and potency] .

Buddhist symbols like vajra found at Unakoti may be explained in this way . All these Buddhist icons come to Unakoti alongwith these hinduised Buddhist tantrics [nath saints] . Buddhism has been practiced in Unakoti in early days and the images of Unakoti show various Buddhist features as discussed in chapter- 4 . Chandrapuri vishay has been established first as a pilgrimage of both the religions Hinduism and Buddhism . But later at the time of Gobinda Chandra [11th century] tantric Buddhism is introduced as the early nathism is a branch of Vajrayana or tantric Buddhism. After the reign of Gobinda Chandra Brahmanical religion rises with the help of Sena and Varman rulers . At that time Vajrayana

, Nathism have been abandoned and Vajrayani nath people have been oppressed by Hindu priestly class people . As a result of such oppression some of those non-Hindu people fly away and the others are converted into Hindus . And thus Buddhism disappeares leaving some influence on social as well as religious life of Bengal . Unakoti shows the symbol of Dharmathakur — the tortoise , Buddhist icons, Ganesha bearing vajra on head and even Buddha head probably .

What happens with Chandrapuri vishay after the fall of the Chandras ? Opinion of Kamala kanta Gupta should be mentioned in this context "After the disintegration of the Chandra kingdom of Vikrampura(Rampal) it can not be definitely said under whom the lands of Shrihattamandala (the division of Srihatta or Sylhet) and more particularly the lands of Chandrapura vishayas area went .

Most probably major portion of the Chandrapura area was annexed to the neighbouring kingdom of Gauda (North Sylhet) and a small portion of it annexed to the other neighbouring kingdom of Tripura (Tipperah) ." [ref:-Copper plates of Sylhet, Sylhet, 1967, p-151-152]

So it is assumed that the small portion of Chandrapuri which is annexed to Tripura is the area of present Dharmanagar, Unakoti and Kailashahar .

Now carving style of Unakoti sculptures needs a special discussion. As it has been studied earlier that there is an influence of 10th-11th century Bengal art in the single piece sculptures of Unakoti and the relief works though they bear

some features of Bengal art but they also show idioms of Tibetian art . Violent facial expression with mask like face is a common feature of northern gods and goddesses and also it is present in relief sculptures of Unakoti . Relation between Tibet, Nepal and this region as well as Bengal has been established in the early ages . 'Pa' bearer Nath saints have a close connection with Tibet as mentioned earlier and the region of Unakoti has been supposed to be the field of their activity . Moreover the early inhabitants of the region Kirats[Kuki probably] or mongoloid people surely have a connection with Tibet , whatever group they belong Tibeto-Chinese or Tibeto-Barmese [ref:-Kak-baraker Utsa Sandhane, p-82,by Shantimoy Chakraborty, research assistant , Tribal Research Institute, Tripura, published by Naising the publishing, Agartala] . So influence of Tibeto-Chinese art and culture may come to Unakoti through these people . So it can be said that the style of relief works is result of an admixture of the features of Bengal art and that of Tibetian art also . Moreover there is a significant presence of local idioms or elements . Influence of folk traditions commonly seen in the society of ancient Bengal is also there at Unakoti . Various rites like 'Panchopasana' , 'Dharmathakur-puja' traces of these religious practices are found at Unakoti . So Unakoti has been influenced by local traditions of Bengal also.

Mythological stories about Unakoti often told by local people have a major significance . As it has been discussed in chapter-1 that Unakoti is a part of Chandrapuri vishay and

all other adjacent places including Dharmanagar belong to the district called Chandrapuri . A great effort has been done by Chandra ruler Shri Chandra to construct a religious complex in this region of Chandrapur . As the legend tells about a king who wants to construct new 'Kashi'here , but the plan finally remains incomplete . The new Kashi of the legend symbolizes Chandrapuri vishay . But after Chandra dynasty has declined the project taken by Chandra rulers remains incomplete because of lack of royal patronaze . Later the whole matter takes form of alegend . Local Halam people have similar story about Unakoti [the story told by Mr. Byomkesh Halam, mentioned in the chapter –'Socio-economic condition of the region'] . In this case a project has been taken by Gods and here Gods may mean upper class royal people that is — Chandra rulers . And similar thing happens in this story . The project remains incomplete.

All these stories indicate the same thing . A project to construct religious complex like Kashi has been taken but remains incomplete . In this region during 10th 11th centuries Chandrapuri vishay is constructed having religious complexes , universities etc. as it is in ancient Kashi . All the stories surely tell about this .

Another story mentioned in chapter 1 is of Shiba and angry Parbati . In this case Shiba has been cursed by Parbati as He has been found with a Kuki woman . It is clear from the story that Shiba of Unakoti has been worshipped by the Kukis in the early ages . Shiba has been cursed because He has

been the deity of Kukis or Kirats and they are considered as lower class people according to the caste system of the society of that time .

After discussing various aspects of Tripura sculptures and rock-cut relief works, it can be understood that the region was advanced in this particular field in mediaeval period and the places like Unakoti, Dharmanagar, Pilak, Deotamura, Udaipur, Sonamura etc. are the evidence of this early advancement. Also some minor works are found which are of late mediaeval period or Manikya period, but these are not related to the early advancement.

Besides analysis of stylistic features of Tripura sculptures, it has been necessary to understand the content of these art forms. In early India all the arts and architectures have been created to fulfill religious purpose. Scuptures and rock carvings of Tripura are also directly related to religion. The icons created in those days also tell about the religious belief of the local inhabitants of that period. Political situation of the region during that period is also implied. Rock-cut images of Tripura also bear local elements which help to understand the socio-cultural life of the early inhabitants of the region. Multicultural atmosphere due to gathering of different artist groups and pilgrims was the background of construction process at Unakoti.

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